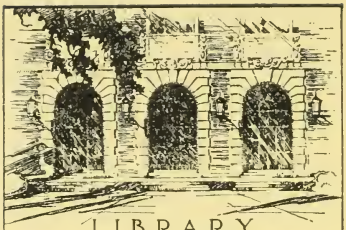

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A WAKING.

A WAKING.

"Ne'er was a dream so like a waking."

Shakespeare.

BY

MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF

"MR. NOBODY," — "GODWYN'S ORDEAL," — "BOTH IN THE WRONG," — "HER OWN FAULT," — "KEPT SECRET," — "LADY HAZLETON'S CONFESSION,"
&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO

THE SON,

WHO WAS WITH ME IN THE AUTUMN OF 1887,

IN A LITTLE HOTEL ON THE SALVAN PASS.

WHERE THE FOLLOWING STORY WAS PLANNED,

TO BE WRITTEN SOON AFTERWARDS

IN ANOTHER MOUNTAIN RETREAT.

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BOOK I.

A WAKING.

CHAPTER I.

A DINNER-PARTY IN CHESTER-SQUARE.

A WARM summer evening in the heart of the London season.

Stuart Newbolt seemed perfectly happy. Handsome, young-looking, reputed to be rich, and of a singular charm of manner, he made a very graceful host at the little dinners which he gave twice a week to an odd mixture of fashionable and literary folk. He well knew how to guide the conversation, how to interest everybody, and how to send the guests away at the end of the evening, feeling as

if for once they had been really brilliant, since Mr. Newbolt had been so interested in all they said and had laughed so heartily at all their little witticisms. And then, as Lady Catering had afterwards told her intimate friend—whom she mentioned every two minutes in her conversation as "the dear Duchess"—"there never was anything so perfect as his table decoration; my dear, it was simply a dream; the whole table covered with some blue gauzy material so waved and puckered as to look just like a lake, with white water-lilies peeping out in every direction, and then groups of Salviati vases filled with orchids, and two large Salviati candelabra—it was too lovely!"

It was Stuart Newbolt's only child, Zina, who arranged the table herself, often spending many hours over it, and each time trying to find some new combination of colour and flowers, and it was she who had suggested the white panelling which with *café au lait* brocade hangings and Venetian glass

was considered so unique and, as Lady Catering said, "so becoming, which is much more important."

Zina was not so popular as her father, but everyone admitted that Stuart Newbolt had a splendid coadjutor in his well-trained daughter, who presided at the head of the table, possessing that special knowledge which could make her society agreeable to literary or political men whenever she chose to exert herself, and who could on other occasions be not only discreet, but silent and enigmatical as the Sphinx, and beautiful as the room which was semi-darkened and flower-laden, with the balconies all ablaze with blossoms, shining in the westering sun —a medley of scents, colours, pictures, and china, in which the sights and sounds of London were effectually excluded.

No one could have guessed that Mr. Newbolt was feeling unwell that evening, or that he had recently had occasion to consult his family physi-

cian, for he was looking his very best. And though there were some gossips who did not hesitate to accuse him of wearing a belt to diminish the size of his figure, or of using cosmetics to soften a skin growing a little wrinkled and rigid with advancing years, there was nothing affected or foppish about him. Nothing could be more free from artifice than his manner that evening as he laughed gaily at some sally made by his pretty ward, Eva Capern, who, although only lately married, was already becoming well-known for her good looks and vivacity, her smart toilettes from La Ferrière or Janet, and her Sunday evening poker parties.

"Society may be rotten," she was saying; "but what would you have? We are the products of society, and if you reform it you must kill us off. For instance, would you really have us dress dowdily and give to the poor?"

"Beauty unadorned," Mr. Newbolt laughed back.

"A thousand thanks!" she replied; "but then you

would at once find me out, and know that it is my art to deceive you and make you think that I am pretty, when really it is only my gowns. Besides, to dress out of the fashion is to become *déclassée*; and in London, this ''Niobe' of nations,' one can't be too particular."

"A woman should be like a diamond; the more beautiful the less conspicuous the setting," said a voice from the other side of the table.

"Yes, and those that need a setting should be killed off. One of the problems of the age is to find out an alias for all sorts of infanticide," laughed another.

"It is these wicked ideas which make a nation ripe for revolution," remonstrated the other voice, which belonged to a faded middle-aged and quietly-dressed woman who, with her white-headed husband of melancholy, expressive face, and a length of beard which Aaron could not have surpassed, were somewhat unwonted figures at Stuart Newbolt's table.

The faintest, politest, delicatest frown passed over the brow of the host. He prided himself on the diplomatic talents often brought into play in eluding that gravity which he considered to be fatal to the digestion. "The Radicals call it evolution rather than revolution, rehabilitation rather than dilapidation; they are enthusiasts," he said lightly.

But Mary Carruthers and her husband, the "retired Scotch professor," as his wife vaguely phrased it—whom Zina had insisted on inviting—were not to be so easily put down. Apparently they thought they had a mission to perform, and Stuart Newbolt winced when they went on to discourse of the decadence of the Romans and the frivolity of the second Empire.

The lady had a nervous way of speaking which Stuart Newbolt could not have tolerated even from the lips of the pretty, loveless, self-indulgent creature who had been confided to his care in her orphanhood, and whom his system of education had rendered so fascinating that everyone forgot her selfishness

and admired her the more for her fragility.

He was too critical to be sympathetic, and had no such thing as a broad comprehension of human beings different from himself. And that the guests at his table should have any more ultimate object than that of toying in dinner-party fashion with those 'imps of ideas' which flit from one mind to another in rapid converse, was sure to be annoying to him. It mattered little if this rapid converse involved a certain amount of iconoclasm in which the idols of one's neighbours happened to be battered, but it mattered a good deal if anything like a skeleton intruded at the feast.

Yet not only did the Carruthers discourse of a sort of socialism which was hateful to him, and jarred on his nerves like a false note, but other things grated on him. An old Canadian whom he had come across in some of his travels and who had impressed him by his weather-beaten face, huge Bardolph nose, and bushy eyebrows meeting like pent-

houses over eyes which were singularly mild and grey, as well as by his large store of anecdotes—seemed inclined to turn the talk on still more serious matters. The Canadian had come to London to sell a new patent in connection with photography, and Stuart Newbolt cursed his own folly for his haste in inviting him, when he found him irrelevantly boasting of the power which photography would bring to bear on the recent discoveries in astronomy.

It was worse still that Mrs. Carruthers should try to give a religious turn to the conversation, naively quoting Dr. Chalmers in a middle-class sort of fashion. A woman, as he thought to himself, might talk commonplace sentiment. It was the speciality of the sex to do so, the only hope being to draw such women into a stream of chatter that fortunately kept them from dwelling too much on the troubles of existence. But Mrs. Carruthers, who had her own public, was not to be so arrested, and Stuart Newbolt did not quite know what to do with

her, when, determining not to come to closer quarters on questions of this sort, he contented himself with remarking quietly that Dr. Chalmers was "a little out of date."

He said this with an urbane smile, and that polite intentness which, as a master of deportment, he plumed himself on never losing. One might have noticed that he kept an extra degree of politeness for middle-aged women, and a look which somehow told them their day was over. But whether it was that Mary Carruthers gathered courage from her desperation, or whether she resented the attempt which had been made to repress her, she quoted, in a tone of enthusiasm,

> "Though worlds on worlds in myriad myriads roll,
> What know we greater than the soul?"

The quotation was made in a highly-pitched voice. It arrested the attention, so that everyone was listening. The voice was not only highly-pitched, but

there was a sort of thrill in it which made Mr. Newbolt wince as if he were listening to some dissonant sound. Was it not well known that he hated anything like religious discussions, considering them bad form at the table, and here was a little woman, with opinions in direct opposition to his own, venturing to come into collision with him?

Lady Catering smiled slightly as the host, keeping his self-command, looked at his guest surprised, and then tried to be satirically amused at the groove into which the conversation was settling itself. Mrs. Carruthers had evidently intended to enlarge on her quotation, but the rest of her words sank into a sort of frightened whisper as she became aware, not only that her host was waiting with some fruit on his uplifted fork, but that there was a sudden hush of other voices, and that all his guests were also listening.

Her cheeks were suddenly dyed with colour. Could the observant Lady Catering have made a

mistake when she imagined that a fair-haired man who sat on the left side of the hostess—a deep-eyed, dreamy-looking young fellow, who had not yet found his vocation in life, but had made some little reputation as a musician and amateur artist—was answering an appealing look in Zina Newbolt's face, when he came to the rescue, and said lightly—

"Who knows that we are not deceived by our senses—if the stars themselves may not be an illusion?" And then he backed Mrs. Carruthers' quotation by asking sentimentally, "What is our waking but a dream?"

Mr. Newbolt's ward tittered audibly as she gazed down at her beautifully modelled, diamond be-ringed fingers. These, at least, seemed to her no illusion, and she was quite of opinion that they might have served as models for a Canova or a Thorwaldsen.

"And if you could argue these questions till the stars burnt out, you would never settle them,"

responded the host, in the light tone he generally adopted—a tone of half-ironical entreaty—when he wished to protest against our gravity as a race.

"Those so-called musicians have a great opinion of themselves," he was thinking, as he flashed back an amused, comprehensive glance at his ward.

But Stephen Dewe's voice did not persist. It was sufficient for him that the jarred look on Mr. Newbolt's usually impassable clean-shaven face was lessened. He knew him well enough to be perfectly sure that a long story or a philosophical speech from a young man who should have known better would be sure to prove boring, something like having to listen to folks reciting poetry. He knew also perfectly well that though Stuart Newbolt would be likely to give his daughter a piece of his mind about her absurd obstinacy in wishing to invite this tactless woman, he prided himself on

being cosmopolitan, on making excuses for everyone and would have no intention of being found fault with for belabouring the popular superstitions. It mattered little to Stephen Dewe if his host should be like Archimedes, who wanted to reduce this little earth to the standing-point from which he could move the whole. Nothing mattered but that he should be able to "keep in" with him, and at the same time to obey the behests of the beautiful creature who was sitting by his side. Then the conversation slid back into the ordinary topics—the last singer who was making any sensation in the fashionable world, the last good picture, or even the last ball at which some well-known beauties had appeared, as well as the last stormy debate in the House. If much of this chatter about actors and actresses, singers at the opera, and the latest fashions was a little more *banal* and trivial than Stuart Newbolt generally liked, he at least had ceased to beat an impatient tattoo with his feet beneath the table, and

had probably to thank himself, for the party was not large enough to indulge in that sudden gabble and gallop of tongues which might have covered the universal resolution to seek a change of topic.

CHAPTER II.

A TIRED BREADWINNER.

"YOU see, my dear, I told you it would be a mistake for me to accept your father's invitations. I could not even afford the dress," said Mary Carruthers with a despondent sigh, when Zina Newbolt visited her a few days afterwards in the ill-furnished lodgings in Great Coram Street, which told an eloquent tale of the hard struggle for existence carried on in them from day to day.

By daylight she wore an ill-fitting serge dress and her hair was tightly gathered up in a knot at the

back of her head. There were downward lines of patient endurance about the nose and the mouth, but there was a look in the steady eyes which contradicted the mouth, telling you that the meekness had not been hers by choice.

She was in a state of depression which was not usual to her.

"Do you think they were so very bad—the deficiencies in my attire?" she asked as if aware that in some way her appearance had not been a success; and Zina could not tell her that the deficiencies in her conversation were worse. Stuart Newbolt did not often allow himself to show his irrepressible impatience with everything which was old-fashioned or commonplace; but those who knew him intimately were well aware that his fastidious nature was continually disgusting him with the ill-chosen wording of a sentence, the infliction of a hackneyed quotation or twice-repeated anecdote. Unconsciously to herself his daughter had fallen

into the habit of watching him furtively, being constantly aware of that something in the attitude of her father's mind which made him acutely sensitive to the deficiencies of his neighbours. She knew that woman's talk as a general rule was condemned by him as "trumpery," and that he complained of the perpetual jabber and clatter of their tongues. Zina adapted herself perfectly to his idiosyncrasy in this respect, knowing when to be silent and when to speak in few words. He prided himself on having educated a very unusual woman. In the case of his ward—Eva Capern—the triumph had not been so great, though Eva was shrewd enough to know also how to humour her guardian's peculiar fancy.

But Mary Carruthers! Her very vocation was to pander to the tastes of her own sex, consequently to make a trade of what Stuart Newbolt condemned as commonplace chatter.

" 'It's such a comfort to have no intellect,' as Jack

Poyntz says in the play," answered Mary good-temperedly, when the Professor nervously protested against such 'trash' as the 'Family Sympathiser lying openly on his table and took care to clear it out of the way. Zina's experiment at transplanting her had only proved a failure. If Mary had been a person of no views the experiment might have been more successful. But Mrs. Carruthers had very strong 'views,' and though she spoke just now in a deprecating tone that was not natural to her, she was secretly conscious of the existence of her own little circle of admirers.

"Do you know, I can remember when I was young, and when I had golden dreams and thought that I could do something better—but that was long ago—I am content now with the lowest rung of the ladder. I have my boys and girls to think of, and I have to put up with these London lodgings—a dingy sort of den isn't this? It seems to me a thousand times more dismal after your

beautiful and artistic surroundings, but you know I could not write in a house like yours; I should be looking about me all the time. Heigh-ho; I am hard up just now for a plot," she said with a sigh.

> " 'The moving accident is not my trade,
>
> To freeze the blood I have no ready art.' "

And then she added, with a half-hysterical laugh, as if she would otherwise have broken into sobs, "I am not so very clever, though I *do* write books."

The dignified Zina, who so rarely unbent to the world, answered by kissing her friend affectionately. "You are better than clever," she said, "you are charming. I should like to know what your husband and children would do without you; it is you, after all, who are the breadwinner of your family.

"Forced to be so by accident, but not by nature," rejoined the other woman, glancing at a table, covered

as usual with untidy papers. "I am translating now, always translating: but I should have been happier if I had not been called upon to fill a place, even as a translator, in my generation."

"You are not your bright self when you talk like that—you are not the '*Liebes Mütterlein*' whom I have learned to honour, when you insist on running yourself down. What matter if your intuitions are keener and finer than your intellect? That is the way with most of us."

Mary Carruthers shook her head. "I am mediocre, and it is my duty to protect the world from the fatal spread of mediocrity. When I succeed and do my best, I am only—according to your father—'one of the fools who are the prophets of Philistia.' That is my trade. I succeed best when I take it up; there is one chord common to the largest mass of readers which vibrates when you touch it, and that is—vulgarity."

"You judge yourself hardly when you talk so

sadly. And it is your sense of humour," said her friend, "which saves you from being too sentimental."

Another heartfelt sigh. "Yet I am one of the folk whose trade it is to revel in the aroma of delicately-scented sorrows, shutting themselves away from their kind, and hugging sorrow to their souls."

She began to laugh, and then came the truth of the matter in the revelation of a little womanly vanity, and a good deal of personal soreness.

"You mustn't ask me any more, dear—you can't expect me to talk as they talk at your father's table. I never believe in conversation as a fine art and doubt if it ever existed. The brilliant wit does not look very brilliant when it is put down on paper, and as to the jests of professional jesters, if they could be repeated in the present days, we should think them—horrid. I must be in earnest in what I say, but I have no time to read—no time even to think. All I have to do is to keep spinning my own brains for the sort of stories which will

please the 'Family Sympathiser.' I have my suspicions that James would tell me the writing is slipshod because I have to write so fast at times. But it must be enriched with a few luscious patches of tall talk, and I must always choose plots which catch. At one time the run was on governesses who married lords, poor girls adopted by great ladies, and ushers at school who were peers in disguise—the next run was on burglars, magnificent Dick Turpins who stood six feet two in their stockings—and now even ghosts are getting hackneyed. My editor says, 'Try Doppelgänger'—he means 'doubles,' but 'Doppelgänger' sounds grander—and how do I know," said Mary in her self-mockery, "whether I am equal to phantasms of the living, when I can't paint the living themselves? Meanwhile I must keep the wolf from the door—so I am doing a little translating."

But Zina was ready with her comfort.

"After all you are writing for the largest class

of readers—a class which is constantly increasing, and which must be supplied with innocent food. You may number your readers by millions—think of the numbers educated in the elementary schools."

"Yes," said Mary, laughing still, though tears were in her eyes, as she blushed like a girl, eager for praise—when do we cease to care for it?—

"If one could hope to keep personal touch with them—if one could lift them up a little—only a step or two at a time—without pretending to be superior. What is it someone says,

> "'Speak to the heart! for that alone is sweet;
> Weak words are mighty that with heartblood beat?'"

"But when an editor says to me that he must have something 'racy' that I must not even speak about the things I care about for fear my readers should think it 'slow', when you have to give them such diet as is generally required by the 'Family

Sympathiser'"—and Mary quoted in mock-tragic tones, from a writer on the same stuff, "'The Duchess made tea for all the little titled ones sitting around,'" till the tears rolled down her cheeks from her excessive laughter.

Then relapsing into a sort of mock gravity, she exclaimed,

"They say that observation is nearly the whole of human genius. But how in the world I should like to know am I to observe, shut up between the four walls of this room, and how am I to know about—detectives—for instance?"

There was a drollery of absolute despair in the solemn intonation of the last few words, but before Zina could answer that she had better try to put herself into connection with Scotland yard, she had forgotten herself and was descanting on the merits of her husband.

"Now, dear, *he* has a mind if you like, a mind which fills me with the profoundest veneration—a

mind far above pot-boilers—you remember his book on Schopenhauer?"

Zina shrugged: she *did* remember it, and how the expenses of publishing it had reduced his family nearly to destitution. She had no great admiration for the professor, who condescended, in spite of his high ideals, to let himself be mainly supported by the labours of his wife.

She did not like to hurt Mary's feelings, and she had never had courage to ask "professor of *what?*" She had to content herself with a vague idea that Dr. Carruthers had been a professor of Oriental languages, or perhaps of philosophy — she did not exactly know which — at Glasgow or Aberdeen — here again her ideas were misty. She owed the 'professor' a grudge from the various occasions on which she had had to parry her father's facetious inquiries on the subject.

In her secret heart she looked upon the self-contented old man as a petulant and wayward child,

whose luxuries had to be pandered to at the expense of other people, and who was one of the most troublesome of all the little ones belonging to this poor, persevering woman, whose energy and determination endeared her to the few friends who knew her as intimately as Zina did. But before she could give utterance to the irrational irritation, which she felt whenever the Professor and his powerful intellect were referred to, there came a patter of footsteps, and a whirlwind of petticoats and knickerbockers, through the door, which was burst open without any ceremony.

"Tell us a story, mammy, you promised us one when we had done our lessons," cried three or four squeaky and eager little voices, the noisy interlopers falling agressively upon their mother before they saw that she had a visitor.

"Hush, darlings, be quiet. Father is sleeping downstairs," responded the mother, all her sweet homeliness and natural liveliness of manner return-

ing to her, as she gazed proudly at these little incentives to her unwilling literary labour.

"Go on, let me hear you," cried Zina, though she could not help feeling rather out of it, as the "Mütterlein" began telling racy stories to her children, her eyes glittering with merriment, till laughter ensued, in which mother and little ones fell together on the sofa in a heap, avoiding the floor for fear of making a noise for the professor. The merriment was infectious, and Zina laughed too, as she took leave of Mary Carruthers, whose efforts to rise were made impossible, in consequence of the little legs twined in inextricable confusion about her.

"Go on, tell us more, mammy, more," the voices were still imploring, as Miss Newbolt went her way, thinking that if Mrs. Carruthers could only write as she could talk with her one or two intimate friends or her own children, easily and brightly, her work would have been worth a good deal more in the literary market. But Mary's play of mirth was

will-o'-the-wispish; it needed the turn of the still pretty neck, and the flash of the merry eyes, to interpret it properly, and when she came to set it down on paper the iridescence was gone.

"There you see," she whispered, as she said goodbye to her friend "I have more than golden compensations in this dingy den where everything is so shabby," and she laughed again, parodying the litany of a brother of the pen, "From dulness and lowness of spirits; from brooding over fancied miseries, Good Lord deliver us."

CHAPTER III.

STEPHEN IS TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

"AND that selfish professor — who could not even work hard enough at his professorship to make it a monetary success—I have no patience with him for turning that true, sympathetic, and merry-hearted woman into the demure and decorous creature who figures in society, and who trembles when she tries to assert herself about the slightest thing, Oh how difficult it is for women who have to work for their bread, with this struggle for life becoming harder and harder—this highwater

pressure driving poor humanity into all sorts of odd nooks and crevices for which it was never intended. I can never give Mary up whether my father likes her or not; I can do little enough for anyone that is of any use—and I mean to keep to her. Why are lots so unequally divided? And yet, she has one thing in her life which I have not—she has domestic love—love in the home surrounding her day and night. I wonder how it feels" mused the girl, who had known nothing nearer to an embrace than the cold peck, night and morning, upon the cheek which she had to present to her father to salute. She could not help pondering over the inequalities in human lots as she got into her brougham, and told the coachman to drive her home to Chester-square. "Poor Mary is one of the women who would face starvation and even Death just to live for the sake of bringing up those children, and her husband—in spite of all his boasted learning—is as big a child as the rest."

The contrast between her own London home and that of the Carruthers struck her more forcibly than usual as she stood at the drawing-room window and surveyed the still luxuriant greenness of the foliage in the square outside, the white lace and rose-coloured blinds of the windows, the decorated walls, the Sèvres-china, the white and gold furniture, with Persian tiles in the fireplace, the brilliant colours of the petunias, the pelargoniums, lobelias, and calceolarias in the window-gardens, and the portfolio of engravings open on the table, with hand-painted copies from Florence of the most celebrated pictures by Botticelli, Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico and Andrea del Sarto.

To an unprejudiced observer, not so used to the luxuries of this world as Zina Newbolt had always been, it might have seemed like a Paradise though it was in the heart of London. But she only thought of Mary Carruthers, and pitied her for her meagre lot. She was not much accustomed to quote

St. Paul, but it occurred to her at that moment to think how truly Paul had said that those who married should have trouble in the flesh. How could Mary tolerate the double annoyance of those noisy, teasing children, and the idle husband who so impressed her with his intellectual superiority? How could a woman so sensitive, so shrinking, and yet so industrious, endure to have the coarse hands of the daily press laid upon her; how was it she could tolerate the brow-beating of publishers?

That evening the Newbolts had another gathering at their house.

"Can you give us a little music?" said one of the guests to his hostess in that interval after dinner when some of the people were tired of talking, or when those men who had talked and eaten till they were ready to yawn, were reclining on the lounges which were one of Zina Newbolt's secrets for making people comfortable.

"I am not accomplished," was Zina's answer.

"Except a thing could be excellent it had better not be attempted at all," was a rule of Stuart Newbolt's which had effectually damped his daughter's enthusiasms. "In the whole world," he was accustomed to say, "there was nothing more dreary and desolating than the domestic infliction which most people dignified by the name of 'a little music.'"

But the want had been anticipated; any hitch was rendered impossible in the arrangements. It was possibly for this reason, as cynics sometimes hinted, that Stephen Dewe was so much of an *habitué* in Mr. Newbolt's house. He was a young fellow clever in his generation, not only ready with neat retorts, playing from his own bat and imitating no one else, but never recalcitrant when asked to be obliging, ready to evoke deep and tender tones from the violin, or to play the piano with a delicacy and finish of touch and a dexterity of manipulation which made that instrument enjoyable.

If he were not a genius, he was at least a man

of talent; the only question being whether he had the originality which would enable him to rise to a foremost place in the profession of music. One of the charms of his music was its thorough spontaneity. He had a fertility of improvisation, and though the passages which he played would frequently recall similar passages in the works of Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, or Bach, he played them in his own fashion. Nothing could be more mysteriously melancholy than this improvisation, if Dewe was in the mood for melancholy, as he proved to be to-night.

One after another the guests fell off. A political lion, jolly, bluff, and middle-aged, who could not distinguish the Old Hundredth from Mendelssohn's Wedding March, suddenly found that his presence would be necessary in 'the House.' A caricaturist for one of the humorous papers, a stumpy young man with short cropped hair, ugly as one of his own caricatures, gazed for some time at the pianist and

the hostess sitting by his side, with an owlish stare from eyes which seemed glazed with indifference, and then hurried home to jot down the lines, such as he could still remember, for one of his etchings. Pity that he was not a more celebrated painter, or the picture before him would have furnished a companion study to Dicksee's celebrated picture of 'Harmony.' The young man had fair hair, which clustered in short curls over his well-developed brow, an aquiline nose, and a complexion which, if it had not been constantly exposed to the action of sun and wind, might have been accused of effeminacy. This impression was corrected by the nervous strength of the athletic figure, whilst the dreamy, deep-set eyes again seemed to contradict in some strange way the idea conveyed by the muscular form, capable hands, and broad shoulders.

Nothing could have contrasted better with him than the graceful outlines of the woman, belonging

altogether to another type. Her forehead was broad and low, but the arch of the eyebrows was vigorous, and beneath the strongly-marked brows gleamed star-like eyes, with dark pupils encircled by irises in which tawny tints were blended with the brown. Her skin, olive by daylight, and ivory-tinted by candlelight, told of the passionate blood inherited from a foreign mother, whilst the bronze-gold of the hair, the depth of the eyes when in repose, the almost perfect line from the forehead to the nose, the full lips, the delicate nostrils, and the firm short chin were further indications of this mixed blood. "Unfathomable," Stephen Dewe had called those eyes, such an impassable sphinxlike look was there sometimes in the somewhat cold beauty of her face, when Zina Newbolt did not choose that others should pry into her affairs. But he had already learnt that they could flash in moments of excitement, and that, under the influence of music, tears could stand in them.

He chuckled secretly to himself when the other guests dropped out one by one, and when Stuart Newbolt, asserting the prerogative of his sixty summers, dropped into a doze in his armchair.

The last to take his leave was the old Canadian, who had been twice invited to the friendly board in consideration of his shortened stay in London. It mattered little to this good-natured egotist to have only himself for a listener, and he was meandering on in a sort of monologue whilst Dewe (who by this time was wandering into modern music) was interpreting one of Rubinstein's most delicious morsels.

Not content with enlarging on a dream of his own for guiding balloons in a novel way which had occurred to no one else, by throwing out ropes with anchors attached to them, he went on to tell the story of a 'cracked' friend who wrote to all the heads of the Governments in Europe to predict a terrific storm, foretelling that no ship could live at

sea at a certain date. The storm had actually taken place, though it had not been so bad as the prediction, and the cracked friend set to work to foretell another. "What is your secret?" the Canadian had asked. "Well," he answered, "if you won't tell anyone, it all turns upon the existence of an invisible moon." Then finding that his hostess was not listening, the owner of the Bardolph nose disappeared, making a sign that the sleeping occupant of the armchair, whose repose had become audible, was not to be disturbed.

"He would make a capital subject for your friend Mrs. Carruthers, who is always on the lookout for fresh types, and pitying herself because she has no longer the old-world models of Jane Austen, or the peasants of George Eliot to study from," said Dewe, waiting with his finger suspended over the keys. "I expect she is delighted with herself when she has unearthed something less stale than usual."

"To know Mary Carruthers you must know her

in her own family. It is the sweet homeliness about her which makes her really lovable," answered Zina in the low tones in which they were accustomed to discourse to each other, when nobody else happened to be listening.

"I have no patience with the husband. Has she ever told you how he——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for Zina answered a little coldly, "She is not given to discussing her domestic affairs with me, even though I count myself amongst her intimate friends."

The young man did not answer that her friends made him jealous. He relieved himself instead by playing a melody of Grieg's. He played it softly and sympathetically; the harmonious chords appealing to her as no language could have done.

Then she added in a softened voice. "You meant to be kind and tolerant, but you were hurting me just now. I was ungrateful; I should have remembered how you almost always fulfil your promise

of helping me, and standing by my friends."

Once more he did not answer, but his hands still wandered over the keys of the piano. He knew that this apparently calm and self-contained woman was in reality very susceptible to emotional influences. He was no match for her in speech, but as she was catholic in her tastes, caring for Offenbach and Strauss, Schubert and Wagner, he had plenty of methods for adapting himself to her varying moods. He found his language in this music which could interpret the restless modern spirit or deal with the mysterious secrets of human life, expressing himself now in tender waiting chords, now in passionate appeals leaping like sparks of living fire from the instrument, and now in the scherzo with its Midsummer night's madness. Sometimes he played familiar 'bits,' but his interpretation of well-known passages was certainly original; and she could never admire it sufficiently as it brought out grand and wonderful new meanings. Apart from his art he

might be comparatively weak, but when he discoursed to her in this fashion, he was powerful. Bitter grief, abiding joy--aye and a tender affection—the girl knew it—would be revealed to her with a glimpse of the hidden depths unsuspected in her own being, whenever he wielded the sorcerer's wand.

Suddenly he ceased to play, and began to sing in a subdued voice.

It was one of Jensen's songs, full of delicate, tender feeling. It had been chosen to interpret certain ideas, and it expressed the anguish of waiting like the cry of a spirit in despair. It was not only by intention that Dewe's voice was modulated to a low key, for in spite of his strength of frame he had little power of filling a room, and could seldom or ever be persuaded to sing in company. But what he missed in strength he more than supplied by expression. It seemed to be less a voice than a soul in distress; he knew its influence over women.

When the last vibrating sound had died away, he glanced at Zina. Her face was turned away. He could only see the undercurve of the cheek, and the neck like the stalk of a lily.

But he knew that her eyes were moist, as they often were when these melodies were wandering over the strings of her heart, causing the high and low notes of her own nature to vibrate in sympathy.

"No one knows but you," she said, "how difficult things are for me at times," and he guessed from the agitated tone that the face which was turned away from him was bathed in tears.

"And if *I* know, why then will you not allow me to share these—difficulties?" said Dewe with his hands no longer on the piano, but strained tightly together, as he asked this question. "Am I to tell you for the hundredth time that I believe you would be happy with me?"

"Every man says that; every man promises us

happiness, and ends by being tired of us—if not in weariness and disgust," she said passionately and almost scornfully, still hiding her tearful face, as she thought of the struggle for the mere necessaries of existence which she had seen in Mrs. Carruthers' household, and reminded herself that she could never attempt to emulate that maternal unselfishness, and that she had been right, years before, in determining never to descend to the petty details which to so many married women were the essentials of existence.

"*You* can wait longer; but, by Heaven! *I* cannot. The coldness of perpetual analysis, and the weak affections which so often go hand in hand with intellectual force, will be all you will have left to you, if I do not try to rescue you. But I tell you I will sacrifice everything to the one task of making you happy," cried the young man as he seized her hand and pressed it against his heart.

Before she had time to draw it away from him she uttered an astonished cry. Stephen Dewe turned his head, and saw that the man whom they had supposed to be sleeping was no longer reposing in his armchair. Neither of the two, who had been so keenly absorbed in their music, had thought of Stuart Newbolt for the last few minutes.

He must have slipped away from his comfortable lounge and crossed the room when they were not looking. Possibly the siesta had been only a ruse. For the man who stood over them was no longer the self-contained man of the world, the somewhat apathetic Mæcenas, whose dominant idea was never to allow himself to degenerate into vulgar excitement. It was as if a mask had suddenly fallen from the Roman-like face, for fire flashed from his eyes, and his features were distorted not only with anger but with a sudden and violent rage.

"You forget it is growing late," he said sternly to his daughter, keeping his eye on her while she

rose and went slowly towards the door, for she was overstrung and never dreamt of resisting his will.

Then finding himself alone with her lover he raved like one of unsound mind.

CHAPTER IV.

STUART NEWBOLT SPEAKS HIS MIND.

STEPHEN DEWE had been taken by surprise. He had spoken out though he had scarcely meant to do so. In a moment he had told Zina what was passing in his heart, though immediately afterwards he was inclined to blame himself for impulsiveness. He was of a high, fastidious spirit, liable to jealousy because it was sensitive, yet too proud to admit the jealousy even to itself. To see the woman he loved constantly surrounded by other men who admired her, to have a horror of the sort of influ-

ence to which she was continually subjected, and yet to submit patiently to the *rôle* of waiting for the crumbs of sympathy which she might choose to fling to him as to a faithful dog, was becoming odious to him. Years ago he had taken a vow against marriage, but he had set himself to save her from being one of those "book-worm sort of women," who according to him—a lover of painting and music—had no soft places in their hearts for children, no tenderness for the weaknesses of their own sex, and no power of returning the affection of the men who loved them. He had secretly triumphed when he saw her softening under the influence of Mary Carruthers, but it was usual to him to reconnoitre the ground before he brought up his forces.

His heart leaped within him even at the thought of winning the woman, whom so many other men had failed to win, and whom he had watched develop from the girl, fragile and willowy in her

teens, to the woman upright as a palm, superb, apparently reserved, and somewhat cold to outsiders. He had not been sure that he approved her father's system of education, and yet for some years he had worshipped her as one of the "blessed Damosels," so long shut in behind the golden bars of their homes, and now sharing the educational advantages of their brothers.

Stuart Newbolt had perceived from the first that the reform in women's education was one which would go down to the roots of our social and domestic life. He had aimed at making his daughter ambitious, and had allowed her but one accomplishment, and that she had studied thoroughly at Rome and Florence, as well as in the Slade School in London. Whereas Stephen had covered yards and yards of canvas, and thrown up one art for another in disgust at his own futility, Zina Newbolt had toiled in silence and had little to shew as a result.

A friendship, which at first had been purely Platonic, had grown up by slow degrees between the woman who was now six-and-twenty, and the man who—looking younger than he was—had just entered his thirty-first year. That Zina should have encouraged him, seemed to her more calculating father one of those inexplicable riddles which the unsolved mystery of a woman's nature is continually offering to the men who believe themselves to be experienced students of life. He blamed himself now for not having anticipated this terrible ending; he told himself he might have foreseen that when he attempted to reverse the proper order of things, Nature, outraged, would take her revenge. And the motherless daughter, debarred from the proper outlets for her affection; the daughter whom he had so moulded by his teaching that he intended her to combine the attractions of both sexes—the strength and reason of the man with the fascinations of the woman—had fallen into the snare of Titania, and

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become enamoured of an—*ass.* Something of this sort he said in his ravings, reproaching Dewe with being a dandy and a dilettante—a fool who had not even the manliness of a Bottom, but who prided himself on his yellow moustachios, his handsome face, and the devices of his tailor. He hinted with withering contempt that his daughter had made the same mistake which was made by so many men of sense, in imagining that beauty of mind must necessarily be allied to that of mere external form. He reminded the astonished suitor that society might be divided, as Goethe had divided it, into the strong men who lead it, the knaves who temporise, and the feeble hangers-on; and that he, Stephen Dewe —a fellow who had changed his profession from time to time and decided on nothing—was one of the feeblest of hangers-on. A hanger-on who had not even sufficient industry to succeed in the profession of music, but only knew how to make tender improvisings on the piano, to steal away a woman's heart.

The younger man's face was white as ashes, but he stood quite still, only moving once, to close the door behind him, while, statue-like, he listened to the angry torrent of words, never once removing his eyes from Stuart Newbolt's face. These eyes, which were generally of a dreamy blue, had taken a deeper tint under the influence of emotion, and glittered like steel. He made no attempt to defend himself, and only once it crossed his mind to wish that the slight tyranny in Zina's manner—a manner which intoxicated him—had not come uppermost to his memory, bearing a faint resemblance to the overbearing savagery so suddenly revealed in her father. Love had exercised its usual power of exorcisim—leaving little scope for any other passion—and, though in the midst of his astonishment he found himself wandering off into one of his speculations as to the very small differences which really existed between the civilised and uncivilised man, and the slight varnish supplied by the culture of

generations, which was after all but the merest crust over the fire and smoke beneath it—he was tempted to no furious rejoinder.

Reserve was one of the qualities which he had in common with the woman he loved. And when Stuart Newbolt (making an attempt to repress the loud and harsh tones into which he, whose caprices were so seldom thwarted, had been betrayed to his own shame) demanded in the softer tones habitual to him on what grounds he dared to propose himself as a possible future husband for such a woman as Zina, he twice essayed to speak, and twice found that the words died away in his throat.

"Shall I ring for a glass of water?" asked his host, as he impatiently paced the room.

And still the curse of silence seemed to have fallen on Stephen. He was a man rather given to canvassing the possibilities of his future. Often and often had he canvassed his opportunities with Zina, and yet there had been nothing offensive or egotis-

tical in his self-consciousness; he was rather inclined to run himself down, assessing the capital of his mental stock at the lowest possible figure. No one knew better than he did that the gifts which lead to a greatness likely to be recognised by a man's contemporaries had not fallen to his share. Neither would his pride allow him to plead that he had a little private property, for—the introspective faculty being strong in his case—he was perfectly well aware that it was the possession of this private property which had proved his greatest snare. He only answered in a low tone, when at last he could control his voice,

"I believe you must have taken leave of your senses. I should be a coward to endure such violence from any other man, but for Zina's sake—"

He was interrupted once more.

"Don't mention that name," said Stuart Newbolt with emphasis, as once more he turned and faced him. "You must never see my daughter again."

His eyeballs were still injected with blood, but it struck Stephen at once that his manner had greatly changed. His voice had become once more low and distinct as he motioned Stephen to a chair, and sat down with something of his old dignity on another.

"You are right. I am not well, and this sudden discovery was too much for me. Let us discuss this thing calmly." And then he said, with something of an unholy chuckle, laying his hand familiarly upon the other's shoulder, "I never before ventured to intrude upon such a delicate subject as your marriage. But let me give you some advice. I saw you paying attention the other day to that pretty little heiress, Laura Newton. The girl is head over ears in love with you; there will be no difficulty on *her* side. Now don't throw her over for a magnificent-looking person like my daughter, who will not have a penny from me if she marries *you.* Don't go forgetting Laura Newton—the other little girl—

she is your real triumph, and she is a lovely little creature, perfect whether in turquoise blue, or in porphyrian green, and ready to afford any number of toilettes."

Stephen winced at this chaffing tone. It suited Stuart Newbolt even less than his passionate rage, and the rapid alternation from one style of address to the other, without any "middle distance" to blend them together, was startling and bewildering.

The little heiress who could not succeed in hiding her infatuation for Stephen Dewe was fragile and delicate in constitution as in artistic tastes. Stephen's instinct was to defend her and protect her from her own weaknesses; but in a certain sense he despised her and could not bear to hear her compared to his goddess Egeria, the sight of whom might inspire a poet to make sonnets, an artist to paint pictures, or a musician to write music. All these varying forms of incense he had offered secretly at Zina's shrine, and he could not believe

that Mr. Newbolt was as ignorant as he pretended to be of these years of devotion. He contented himself with moving his hand in a deprecating way, as in the same light mocking tone Stuart Newbolt continued—

"My daughter is another matter—are you not *afraid?* She is capable, for aught you know, of good or evil to any extent. A splendid match should be hers. For my own part the reason why I have so long consented to her remaining single is because I have not yet seen the man, titled or millionaire, whom I should consider to be good enough for her."

By this time the younger man realised that the 'chaff' was taking a form with which it would be difficult to contend. No open enemy was worse than a mocker. The beads of perspiration stood on his brow. He was not to be easily daunted, or reasoned with, as if he were a child to be shaken out of a passing fancy. But there were times when

Zina's father alarmed him—times when he was inclined to believe the strange stories which were afloat as to a sort of devilry in the family. What sort of man was this who seemed to enjoy giving swordthrusts and putting another into confusion by reminding him of his disabilities?

"It would be a pity if your talents were allowed to rust unused," sneered Newbolt, "but there are plenty of other people to appreciate them; they will enable you to occupy a creditable position as a drawing-room knight."

The flush deepened on Stephen's face. "Your daughter—" he began, but the words were taken out of his mouth.

"Allow me to hear of my daughter's feelings from her own lips; it is difficult for me to believe she has been more communicative to *you* than to me."

The perspiration again stood on the younger man's face. The difficulty of controlling himself was great, but he reminded himself that he had

had his 'good time' for a few blissful seconds of that chequered evening. Yet the hide of the rhinoceros had seemed as if it would be a gift worth having, as he had faced the storm of shot with which he had been pounded since.

"If that is your last word I have only to wait," he said coldly as he rose to leave the room.

And then it was Stuart Newbolt's turn to lock himself in his study, and sink exhausted on the sofa. He had sent away the man, and he thought—with a repetition of the disagreeable chuckle which was by no means natural to him—of the bitter insults which he had forced him to swallow with writhing lips. But the woman had still to be dealt with and she had alarmed him lately.

CHAPTER V.

ZINA HAS IDEAS OF HER OWN.

STUART NEWBOLT had honestly believed that he was doing the best for his only child in educating her out of superstition and the weak womanly emotions which he had deliberately discouraged, bringing her up to secularism and what he called 'common-sense' from her infancy. Accomplishments were out of court, but his first cause for alarm had been in her early girlhood when he found that she was strongly moved by both music and painting; that the same emotional temperament which made her love the

study of Shelley led her to condemn both Pope and Dryden, and that—later on—the pathos and finish of young Dewe's songs could stir her into emotion, and wake her into feelings of which—if her father could have moulded her completely—she never should have known the existence. Her ideals and enthusiasms were continually surprising him, and it was no comfort to him to be compelled to look upon them as a part of the hereditary weakness of her emotional womanhood. He made excuses for her; but there were times when in spite of her dignified manners, and proud reserve amongst strangers, he thought her wanting in judgment.

Her obstinacy had vexed him more than once lately; as when in her liking for Mary Carruthers, and her determination in choosing her for her most intimate friend, she had given one of the first signs of an independent will, and of the struggle which might be waged in the future between his own determination and that of an originally fine and

fervid nature which had more or less taken the impress of his.

She had from the first taken a violent fancy to a woman whose life seemed to be led on quite another plane of existence from that of all the other people whom she was accustomed to meet. Mary was like a dweller in another planet. She had talked a little sadly during their last interview, but in reality the quaint motherly woman was singularly free from that curse of the century, that habit of melancholy rhapsody which she left to the professor. She refused to look long on the dark side of things.

"I take it all *higher*," as she once said mysteriously to Zina. "If one pretends to be a Christian one must not be over-careful, and then it is astonishing the openings which come in answer to prayer?"

Miss Newbolt had smiled a little patronisingly; she thought of quoting Huxley, and then desisted. This new experience of a woman making herself happy when she had only—as Zina phrased it—

"twopence in her pocket," was piquant and original, and so was the thought of a helpless little body like Mary fighting so hard to wrest fortune and happiness for those whom she loved.

Nothing had persuaded Zina to abandon her friend, not even her father's sneers. In vain had he quoted Dr. Johnson, who never wished to meet a fool in Heaven, adding drily that "the majority of people who thought themselves safe for it were fools, and Mrs. Carruthers as great a fool as the rest." She had only vehemently defended Mary from the sweeping aspersion of foolishness.

So long as the purveyor for the "Family Sympathiser" had not appeared at any of Stuart Newbolt's dinner-parties—to which, as he explained, he might admit a few lions, but no jackals or hyenas, and certainly no donkeys—he had managed to treat his daughter's friendship for Mrs. Carruthers as a matter of supreme indifference. Still that friendship was somewhat ominous as betokening a weakness

of sex. A straw might show in which way the wind sat, and it would be painful if Zina's tastes, which were generally good, should betoken the inconsistency which he considered to be characteristic of women.

It was possible she might show the same obstinate determination in the case of this musician.

An eager desire to know the worst and settle the question once for all tormented Stuart Newbolt when he determined, before he slept that night, to summon his daughter and let her know that he wished this acquaintance to be discontinued. He had thought it possible he should have to argue with her, but he had not counted on the steady temerity of her opposition. Seating herself on one of the easiest chairs, and leaning back against the soft cushions, with no signs of agitation or of haste, she asserted her intention of never giving up Stephen Dewe.

"You need not trouble yourself to be annoyed about it—we can wait—I am in no hurry to be

married," she said in her melodious voice, even ending with a little laugh.

Her character inclined to gratitude, and she had no intention of vexing her father. To live her life as she was living it, with all the resources of wealth at her command—wealth which did not bore her—to have just the amount of amusement which she enjoyed, to associate occasionally with people of world-wide reputation, and to keep Stephen as a delightful accessory to the other pleasures of existence, without any thought of separating herself from her father—apparently this was her programme.

It seemed to Stuart Newbolt childish and weak. He lost his patience as he had lost it before.

"Anyone might infer from your attitude that you were absurdly in *love* with this apology for a man," he said in his most sarcastic tones," but how often have I told you what it means to be in love. It means to make a fool of yourself—to expect things from life which you cannot possibly get—Take the

experiences of nineteen out of every twenty girls who marry for what they call—*love*. Expect nothing, and be properly matter of fact—treat marriage like every other business contract—and you will save yourself from heart-rendings and despair—the lot of most sentimental weaklings, who lay up for themselves a heritage of disgust and wretchedness."

She did not answer. There seemed to be nothing for her to say, and she was evidently determined not to be drawn into a discussion.

Her silence and something in the expression of her face irritated him. "If you think I am to be turned from my resolution by the foolish caprice of a woman, you are mistaken," he cried with an oath, dashing his hand on the table before him with such vehemence that a delicate specimen of Viennese china fell on the parquet floor, and broke into fragments.

Zina rose, and made as if she would have picked up some of the largest pieces. Then—as if she had

changed her purpose, she advanced slowly towards him, and looked straight into his eyes. Her own were dark almost to blackness, and there was something in their expression which made him recognise how he had broken in that moment of fury something more valuable than the Viennese vase.

"The vase can be put together with china cement and will be almost as valuable to the dealers, it would be a good thing if other fractures were always as easily mended" she remarked in her coldest way, "let us bid each other good night."

The tone was no longer filial; it was imperative as his own. He had heard her use it once or twice in her life when some young suppliant for her favour had to be put in his proper place, or when some fulsome compliment from another had roused her indignation. On those occasions he had admired her for it, wondering a little at the stateliness into which she had grown, but feeling amused by her

queenly graciousness, for she had spoken in her usual quiet way and dismissed them in a manner which was almost friendly. Did she think *he* was to be patronised in the same regal fashion?—he who was used to rule everyone, but who had always guessed that the time might come when their wills would be in collision. Stuart Newbolt felt at that moment as if he had foreknown the interview, or as if it had taken place in some previous state of existence, so familiar did it seem to him with all its details. He had called Dewe an ass, but he saw now that *he* had been the fool in not perceiving the incongruity between the actual and potential position occupied in his house by this queenly woman. Had he not educated her himself to be his match in philosophy and logic; had he not rejoiced when he had found her ready to reason that if her father made researches it should be a part of her duty to keep up with them, that she might never be behind in filial sympathies?

She was a bit of a genius and he had sometimes comforted himself by the thought of the immeasurable distance there would be between her and the ordinary young men she met in society. She was unfortunately something of a *femme incomprise;* but was it possible that she had also her distinct individuality, and had he been wrong when he prided himself on her freedom from sentimental maladies?

"Father," she repeated, in that chilling voice which she had sometimes used when she had wished to keep up her own dignity, "let us understand each other once for all before we part, and then we will not allude to this subject again. I am in no hurry to be married, but, sooner or later, I *mean* to marry—Stephen Dewe."

For a minute or two they regarded each other in silence.

He, too, had the blankest stare for the people whom he meant to cut, but this stare in no wise affected his daughter. He failed to control her

with the power of his eye. His heart began beating as Dewe's had beaten a few minutes before, but he was used to managing women, and smiled ironically.

"You say that you have made up your mind," he responded with that smile; "do you not think it possible that I may make up mine also?" The exasperating influence of her words, her looks, and her tones were by degrees breaking down that self-control on which he prided himself. He betrayed himself by the unwonted flushing of his face, and by the unusual touch of asperity in his irony as he added, "I might have known that you had some idealistic prospect, when you refused offer after offer, and declared your intention of remaining with your father—always *that* with you women, you know—some pet little castle in the air, with no foundation in reality!"

"And what is *your* prospect for me, ask yourself—if you wish me to argue like a reasonable being. You do not look on to the end. Ask yourself if

the rich or successful man whom you would wish me to marry despite want of love on my part, would not learn to hate me, or if I should not learn to hate him, and if that would be the successful climax, as it is of so many marriages in respectable and fashionable London?"

The beating of his heart was becoming alarming; it suggested the possibility of physical disease. Years before, a doctor had warned him that mental excitement might be disastrous in his case.

It was important to end the interview.

"What is the use," he said, with a deprecating smile, "of putting yourself in a towering passion instead of being thankful—for having escaped a danger—a danger which was becoming a serious one? Theory may do very well for you; action fortunately, rests with me; and from this day I shall forbid young Dewe my house."

He had saved his dignity, and she had also saved hers, as she left the room with a grace which few

women could have equalled. There was an eloquence in the poise of her head and in every line of her back, which he could not help admiring, as he characteristically compared it to that of Sarah Bernhardt, or of Ristori in her young days, when she had been at her best. There was more remonstrance in his daughter's movements as she silently left the room than there would have been in rude unmeaning speech.

He caught himself thinking of the limitations of human language, and of the abysses of solitariness between himself and this his nearest and dearest relation—abysses not to be bridged over by words—whilst that musician fellow had probably a means of communicating with her which could find out the more sensitive places in her nature. What madness to have allowed him this means of communication, giving him the pull over himself, for years which could never be recalled! Who could tell how far the mischief might have gone? The furniture of the

room swam before his eyes, and he sank again exhausted into his arm-chair.

He was of a nature thoroughly to enjoy his existence, and it required some great and startling blow like the present to rouse him into consideration. His tendency was to let his affairs drift on as they might, trusting that nothing would go very wrong or so wrong that an energetic effort could not remedy them at last. He could never have given utterance to Metternich's reflection that after him the deluge might come, but he always had a vague impression that such might be the case. It seemed, however, now, that the deluge might come at once, and he perceived the necessity for rallying his powers to meet it.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUDDEN ILLNESS.

On the next day Stuart Newbolt was ailing, and his illness seemed to put his daughter seriously in the wrong. He had realised for the first time that when she had made up her mind on a subject she was not at all likely to give way, and it even occurred to him as possible that she might have also inherited strong temper from him, as well as a will which was unbending as iron. The subject of heredity became perplexing, not to say mortifying, when viewed in this fashion. That a woman, whom

he had moulded and whom he had always hoped to dominate by his own personality, should have this force and fire about her was altogether annoying. He felt he had a right to be angry with her.

He had been so long accustomed to be the only person to be considered, that he had the appearance of pardoning her even when he made her suffer.

"Yes, I am altogether out of sorts," he said, when he returned in the afternoon earlier than usual from his club, and it was impossible for her not to be struck by his extraordinary pallor, or not to be alarmed when she saw that he shivered as though under the influence of fever.

He refused to summon medical aid, but did not interfere with her when she insisted on putting off the guests who had been invited for the following week. In the *tête-à-têtes* which ensued, it struck her more forcibly than it had done before, that he insisted on treating her as if she were a girl—a big child—

and that the intercourse between them was of a very curious kind indeed.

Her womanly intuition was no longer at fault; it read the true meaning of the selfish interdict and threw a new light on a position which was one of subjugation, making her revolt from the idea of wearing a yoke. She had spoken out once for all, but she determined to say no more. A sense of filial duty restrained her from making things uncomfortable now that her father was not well. But she no longer smiled or bubbled over with quiet mirth, when her father made his dry and somewhat cynical jokes, and he—in his turn—ceased to compliment her on her pertinent ideas, and opportune answers.

In his secret heart he accused her of not being at all amusing, and resented the fact that her accustomed reticence subsided at last into absolute silence.

The old habit of bowing to his authority remained,

and this habit was so strong that the utmost resolution she could summon ended in an acknowledgment of the impossibility of acting openly against him.

She said to herself, "His opposition may keep me unmarried as long as it is my duty to remain with him, but he can never force me to marry anyone else."

In accordance with this resolution she had written to Stephen Dewe swearing faithfulness, but no one knew better than she did how oddly her letter must read. "I shall love you always, always—as long as life can last, and afterwards if I can—if there is any future in which we can meet." Yet what was it she could promise—the faint chance of meeting again in an indefinite future?

Was there any woman in whom she could confide? She thought of Mary Carruthers, but Mary had her own burdens, and she would inflict no more upon her. Her father had bidden her to select Eva Capern as her greatest friend. But though Eva

prided herself on her conversational aplomb, and was never easily worsted in society, capping the men's remarks with sharp little sayings of her own, no one knew better than Zina how poor and how shallow were her counsels to those of her own sex. Eva, for all her appearance of youth, was a couple of years the elder of the two, and prided herself on her thorough emancipation when, a short time before, she had married a man who seldom interfered with her, and who had both riches and reputation. It had been a joke between the two women that she would make a capital *chaperon* for her guardian's daughter when she was married. And Eva, who dearly loved a position of importance, and who had some fancied scores to pay off in the past, had already assumed the patronising airs of a somewhat jaunty matronhood.

Could it be possible to tell *her?* Did not Zina know already, that weeks ago her anger had nearly suffocated her when she had but a slight suspicion

of the actual fact? No, her heart told her she had no ally, but possibly an enemy, in Eva Capern, whose suspicions were to be eluded, and whose observations were to be drawn away from the dangerous track. The best hope would be that Mrs. Capern had forgotten all about the supposed imprudence, and that her thoughts would be engrossed with her own affairs.

Meanwhile, day by day, Zina wrestled not only with her loneliness but with an all-abiding pain. She determined not to be conquered by it. If the world was ruled by two masters, pain and pleasure, she saw no reason why she should be worsted by the first. She fought the battle with her natural despondency.

"If you are determined not to think of a thing, you do not," she said to herself, with a desperate resolution to fall back on prose, and not to surrender the citadel of her heart to the false-poetic.

She was not one of the people who could drift

with circumstances or allow fate to decide for her. She had learnt from Mary Carruthers to ask always "What is right to do?" From Mary too, she had learnt to try to conquer the habit of allowing herself to become restless or brooding—a habit to which she was inclined by nature.

Just now she would not allow herself to look on to the future, or to think that her ideal of a perfect life would be shadowed, if, after all, she should be called upon to relinquish the hope of a great passion, and to look upon her existence as a compromise. Perhaps when the years passed on Stephen Dewe would forget her, or would cease to care, and she utterly refused to let herself think of the blank which life might be to her if he did not care.

She had tried to be always on the alert, keen to perceive her duty, and to act up to it, and she had much to do now when her father was out of sorts, and when the irritability of illness prevented him from being like his usual self. He had evidently

much to say to her, but the reserve which he had always maintained about his private affairs prevented him from giving scope to his feelings, or relieving his mind of something which seemed to weigh upon it. There were days when he was wretchedly low, or when he would talk bitterly, as she had never heard him talk before. Sometimes he would get up and leave the room as if he wished to be alone, at others he would take up a book and never turn the pages of it; or gaze straight in front of him, with a frown which she had never seen before on his forehead.

At such times she would wait upon him with the most devoted attention, half irritated with him and half vexed with herself when she saw his brow drawn together, and shrank from the resentful antagonism of his face; trying to persuade herself that there was no diminution of her loyalty to him, though that which had happened had made their companionship joyless.

But now and then a strange idea was gaining on her in spite of herself—that there was not an inch of common ground between them. The altruism at which she aimed was difficult to live up to; she demanded too high a standard from others as well as herself; and there were times when the faults of others distressed her, and she found it difficult to forgive them.

The difference of temperament, which is so much worse than any difference of opinion, had always existed as a fatal barrier between herself and her father, making her shy and reticent; but it seemed to be only lately that she was conscious of an aversion, not so much to the man himself, as to his modes of thinking, his moods and habits.

The doctors were summoned at last, and discoursed much of the vibrations of the nerves, and of the palpitations of the heart. But their discourses did not seem to throw much light upon the matter.

And Zina, in her nervous mood, shrank from the apartment in which her father sat, immovable, like a carved idol set up in the middle of the room to be worshipped, a fetish which did not take the trouble to turn its head. She began by degrees to have a horror of the room with its pictures, books, statues, and china, and to feel that there was something magnificent and solemn, but almost uncanny in the spectacle of this figure—with its grey and luminous eyes, which were the only sign of life about it—not rising, but indicating its wants with its finger.

And by degrees her bravery flagged. Naturally religious and denied the proper outlets for religion, she was afraid of becoming superstitious. Powers inimical seemed to be around her. She was conscious of them, they weighed upon her.

She was haunted by the idea, vague but importunate, that her father had a sense of property in her, and that it was less on account of any love he

might feel for her than on account of this feeling of proprietorship, that he was so loath, during the days of his illness, to let her out of his sight. He prided himself on the fact that he had taught her to think, and now she seemed to be haunted by the malady of thought. "It is thought, and thought only, which distinguishes human beings from brutes, and creates the barriers between right and wrong," he had often said to her.

But in the days of her confinement to the sick room she did not find herself able to pick and choose her thoughts. When alone in her own apartment she would walk up and down, up and down, thinking and thinking till her head seemed to go round.

Stephen Dewe had written again to her, reproaching her for her too ready submission to her father's wishes. But she had nothing to answer to Stephen. Her ideas of marriage were not the ideas of an untrained girl; her acquaintance with literature,

and her honesty in dealing with herself, forbade her to entertain the thought of battling with a poverty which her tastes and her training had by no means fitted her to bear. She could not answer her lover in his own vein.

CHAPTER VII.

UNEXPECTED GOSSIP.

THE next few weeks were passed in a state of vexed discomfort, against which Zina struggled feebly, with a vague craving and restlessness which had been before unknown to her.

There were days when Stuart Newbolt seemed to be a little better, but few and fewer confidences passed between him and his daughter. Sometimes for an hour or two he would bury himself in his papers, but the examination of these documents only served to make him more irritable. Doubts

and perplexities generally assailed him in the twilight hour, and at this time his nervous suspicions would be visited upon Zina. All this exhibition of pessimism was so new in the man that the daughter was startled by it, her own dread of being repulsed making it more and more difficult for her to speak her mind openly to him. Stephen continued to write, his tone being naturally one of complaint, and Zina—quick to reproach herself—accused herself of behaving not quite honourably to him. It would have been perhaps better and fairer, she told herself, in her depression, to have dismissed his suit altogether, leaving no element of uncertainty in his life.

Her reticence did not please the invalid. "I don't want a woman in extremes—either a dunce or a blue-stocking," he had been wont to say complainingly; "and girls are always in extremes. You are no exception to the rule. When I want to be amused, you are cold as marble."

And she did not answer him according to his

humour. She was not like most women, finding her ready relief in letting off a stream of angry words; she was chary of the reckless speech which some use as a safety valve.

If only she could have been let alone without interference from meddlesome outsiders! But Eva Capern, whose earthly ideas formed a powerful counterpoise to her attractions, was constantly flitting backwards and forwards to the house, deluging her with questions, or making suggestions which only increased her perplexity. Mrs. Capern, from whom Zina shrank, had found it amusing enough to act as adviser to her guardian's daughter, whose style of beauty formed a remarkable contrast to her own. But the two had never been friends, and the worldly little chaperon had been ready, from the first, to complain that Zina never seemed to be properly touched by the admiration of others, but treated it as if she had had too much of it, and as if it worried and annoyed her.

Her complaints now were that Zina was wasting her time in securing one of the most brilliant matches of the season, and that she had already refused the most eligible *partis*. "You know it is nonsense for you to talk, but you cannot go unmarried for *ever*, and now you are losing your opportunities as you always do lose them. Only the other day Sir James Maddox was inquiring anxiously about you. I know that he has left his card half-a-dozen times at the house, but all that makes no difference to you—you strange girl. I believe you never even see your cards."

Zina did not hear her. Experience had taught her not to discuss these questions with Eva. Marriage without love seemed to her a profanation, but more than once when she had tried to say so, sharp altercation had followed. She was occupied with her own thoughts, but the expression of her face was tragic, and contrasted strangely with her usual composure of manner.

"You are always in a brown-study, and I don't understand," Mrs. Capern went on excitedly, "however you can immure yourself like this, losing your complexion in a sick-room; your father is the last man to require such a sacrifice; he has too much common-sense, and he spoke to me before his illness about this very subject of Sir James Maddox. It is not a question of very serious illness; you have a trained nurse already, and why should you continue to play the part of a nurse? You are not fitted for it. You bury yourself, shut yourself up in the dark, and then wonder that you are sad. You must rouse yourself, you always *did* need to rouse yourself."

There was a shrillness in her tone which made the other woman look up with a start. "I think it is my father who requires to be roused, like the poor creature in 'Dombey & Son'," she said, dashing wildly away from the unwelcome subject of her prospects in marriage, thankful that she had been able to keep her secret to herself, and that

Mrs. Capern knew nothing of the late episode with the objectionable Stephen Dewe. "My father makes me anxious. I will try to recollect the *sine quâ non* —that he must be *roused.*"

"I am sure *you* have nothing to complain of with such a brilliant future before you, if only you knew how to make the best of it," continued Mrs. Capern, unbuttoning her long gloves as if she intended to make a further stay in a house which she considered to be almost her own. "Your father will soon be well; everyone is seedy at times—but, thank Heaven, he will soon be well enough to exert his authority, and to look after his own interests, which seem to me to need it terribly. Everyone takes advantage when a man, who is as popular as he is, is lain aside." Zina raised her head and looked at her.

The answering look was altogether so light-hearted that one might have supposed there was no such thing as a real sorrow in the world to see the pleasant self-assurance of this butterfly of fashion. But

her pleasantries were felt to be unseasonable just then, and Zina replied coldly, with a haughtiness which was characteristic, "I have made up my mind never to obey any arbitrary injunctions from my father or anyone else, and this is a question which, as I have told you a thousand times, I refuse to discuss with anyone."

"Don't you be bitter. What do you know about it?" queried Mrs. Capern, with a persistence which showed a grim absence of tact as she brought her back to the point; "it seems to me you are perfectly demented. If you have told me this a thousand times, how often have I told *you* that I utterly despise that idiotic class of women which insists on ignoring plain facts which are straight before their eyes. Now you have got to live in the world, and have everything as you have been used to it—everything of the *best*—you know everyone likes the best—and the question is, *how* you will live in it, if all the things they say are true, by-and-by?"

She nodded as if to emphasize her question, and gazed impatiently at Zina, who still sat motionless, with her arms crossed before her, wondering on the one hand at the sort of daring which made discomfiture, and all attempts at arresting conversation, utterly impossible in Eva's case; perplexed on the other by what seemed to be the extraordinary irrelevance of the question.

She turned her beautiful eyes inquiringly upon Mrs. Capern, who answered comically, and almost childishly, "Now do not make the worst of it. Oh, I give you my solemn assurance that I have nothing to do with it; but since your father has been ill the gossips do not hesitate to circulate the most odious scandals at his expense. Of course they are all pure fabrications, and I don't believe a word of them, but they have rummaged up a lot of cock-and-a-bull tales about his youth, and say that he has eaten up his fortune and is loaded with debt. Some of them do not hesitate to add that he is

shamming illness, and that the key of the whole domestic situation is that he wishes to marry his daughter to some old fellow who has millions—a Jew, I think they say—and that the daughter is refractory. Now you have the whole of it."

Zina looked at her with her eyes flashing; there was a hardness in her face, and she was positively trembling. "Oh, I would rather die," she said "than live on the low level of lives like these! Lives which are spent in retailing the most foolish pieces of gossip—not only foolish, but abominable, and to be treated with contempt."

"If I could see him and watch him for myself—look into his eyes with my own—I should be able to tell whether it were quite such foolish gossip," the other woman was thinking to herself. "Thank Heaven he has nothing more to do with *my* affairs."

But though Eva's visits were of daily occurrence she was never allowed to see the invalid, whose nervous

illness was always aggravated by the presence of any intruder.

"Mind, I do not vouch for the truth of anything I hear, but I thought you would like to be told," she said, as she tripped away, rather satisfied than otherwise with the results of her own diplomacy in supplying Zina with a reasonable motive for encouraging the attentions of Sir James Maddox — in case, as she put it, that anything should happen to her father.

And Zina, who had been used in the old days to these skirmishes between herself and her father's ward, remained in future exasperatingly quiet, in spite of the desperate attempts made to shake her resolution.

She had always resented the fashion in which Mrs. Capern—generally clever enough to hit on congenial subjects in her guardian's presence—threw off the mask at once when alone with his daughter.

"She does not really care for him; it seems to me that no one cares for him, and I myself have been

disloyal," thought Zina with a new tendency to self-reproach.

After all, considering that Eva's visits were so constant, it did not do to take to heart the ridiculous things she said. Yet her guardian had been good to her, he had always been partial to her, and in the days before her marriage he had ever been careful of her interests, and Zina, in her just indignation, wondered how she could stoop to listen to those who did not hesitate to vilify and blacken his character.

The gossip should be nothing to *her*, she told herself as she returned to her father's couch, reminding herself of the tragedy in so many lives—of happiness wrecked not by great things, but by small suspicions and small collisions of will, and determining that it should never be so in hers.

And yet as she watched by him when he slept, little things which she had almost forgotten returned

to her unwilling memory—how someone had told her that at the age of twenty her father had gambled away his small inheritance at Monte Carlo, and how, after a sleepless night during which he had first of all made up his mind to blow out his brains, he had re-appeared in the gaming room and won again more than he had lost.

And then there was that story of his marriage—Zina's own name corroborated that tale—how he had met her mother abroad, a beautiful orphan child, some said of Russian, and others of Polish extraction; and how he had placed her in an English school, and educated her himself with a view to marrying her when she should be of suitable age. She was said to have been good and sweet-tempered as well as beautiful; but Zina was not ignorant of the gossip which asserted that her father had first seen her mother begging her bread at the roadside; and that when he found it impossible for her, after the slight education he had given her, to

shine in cultivated society, he afterwards mal treated her.

Zina could herself remember some stormy scenes in her childhood, and could believe that her father's thirst for distinction, and his desire for personal aggrandizement, might have caused him to treat her mother with cruelty. If so, such behaviour would be difficult to forgive.

Hitherto she had been too filial, with her sense of kinship too strong to allow her to put anything but the best construction on these episodes of the past; but now, for the just time, she was ready to assume that her mother had been treated with unkindness and neglect. She had often before had a doubt of her father's judgment, but till now she had never been pre-disposed to think him in the wrong. Doubtless, she said to herself, in those scenes which she remembered in her childhood, he had been always in the wrong.

The thought steeled her heart against him. The

attempt to gloss over the difficulty which she was conscious of feeling, and to simulate indifference, roughened her voice. She stopped with a little cough to clear her throat, more than once when she was in close attendance on her father.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORBID FEARS.

STUART NEWBOLT'S illness increased. The doctors did not as yet pronounce it dangerous, but there were times when nursing him and seeing him suffer affected Zina painfully, and when his spasms of agony were repeated in her face.

She lived through the next few days in a sort of nightmare, suffering mentally as well as bodily. There were occasions when she seemed no longer to think, only to feel—with variable moods like the shifting sky—when all her good resolutions were

put to flight, and when she blamed herself for her fervid temperament, trying not to let herself be borne along by the emotion of the moment. Emotion, as she knew, did not produce action; experience had taught her the distinction. But she was sorely in need of a helper. After a time even Mrs. Capern had ceased to come, and though Zina hated her worldly insinuations and trivial gossip, wincing at the accusations so easily made by one who was sharp-witted as well as sharp-tongued, yet the loneliness was not good.

One night, when her spirits had begun to rise because the bulletin which the doctors had issued was, "a little better," she began to think she might take a longer interval of sleep, lying down in a room close to the invalid's. But towards the morning she was roused by the sound of angry speech in the adjoining room. The sick man's voice was raised, loud and angry, but the nurse's tones were lower, pleading, and a little frightened. Zina was on her feet in a

moment, to find her father in a state of half-delirium, making violent accusations of the nurse—accusations which were now bordering upon rage, and now subsiding into tones of querulous complaint. It seemed that the poor woman had taken advantage of the lonely hours of the night to discourse with him on his spiritual state, and to urge on him the necessity for seeing a priest. His excitement, almost bordering upon frenzy, was out of all proportion to the unintentional offence. He declared that he would have no more nurses: they were all in league with the Jesuits, who were death to the progress of any nation; he said he would like to have all the hypocritical priests strung up in a row like the malefactors they were; and he declared that the poor innocent-minded, sermonising nurse was the colourless, negative tool of these creatures, thinking herself safe for the kingdom of heaven.

The servants, used to these "nervous attacks," as they called them, in their master's case, crowded round

him, and it was difficult to prevent him, in his present delirious condition, from warning them to have nothing to do with the dull ascetic religion which retarded the world's progress and led men back into bondage.

It was necessary, as the doctor said when he was sent for, to "clear the decks," and then Stuart Newbolt would have no one near him but his daughter —the nurse, angry and hurt, insisting on remaining, but cowering away from him in a corner of the room.

Zina was vexed and ashamed. It had been such a comfort to have a trained nurse; till one had come she had felt so horribly incompetent. And, although the woman had naturally a sense of her own importance and this episode had shaken the girl's confidence in her judgment, there was no need to quarrel with her, or to doubt her efficiency.

Still she knew how hopeless it would be to cross her father. It was necessary to take the onus of the situation on herself, knowing, as she did so, that

the compromise which she proposed must sound inconsistent and tyrannical to the outraged woman's ears, if it were not altogether contrary to her printed rules.

"Nurse—I hope you will not misunderstand—but I think I had better *seem* to take the nursing into my own hands—just for the present—to humour him—especially at nights—" she said in apology.

There was nothing else to be done, for the nurse was unwilling to be sent back to the Home, and the patient—who was still sitting up in his bed, the beads of sweat standing on his forehead, and his face convulsed with anger—became still more excited whenever the question was debated of whether a second nurse should be summoned from the institution. For the first time it occurred to his daughter that possibly there was a strain of madness in these fits of temper.

The thought was a terrible one, but it was the only hypothesis which seemed adequately to explain

those other scenes which she looked back upon in her childhood. Better, if so, that this illness should end fatally than that he should linger to be a curse to himself and others, with that taint of madness increasing, and an awful future in store for him.

She tried to reason herself out of the idea, and to comfort herself with the thought that she would rather have to deal with an irritable man of this sort who cared enough for his fellow-creatures to vent his choler on them, than with the cold impersonal statue which she had tended lately. But the morbidity engendered by a too close attendance in the sick-room was already gaining on her, when it struck her that *she* too must have inherited the violent temper, and that the feeling of resentment with which she had waited upon him at the commencement of his illness had been unamiable, if not altogether unnatural.

"We cannot either of us plead our natural goodness as an excuse for dispensing with the assistance

of a priest," she thought with a little sigh, as she made another effort of will to put these distracting fancies on one side; and set to work in a practical matter-of-fact way to collect the tumblers and plates which had accumulated in the room.

"These had better go down," she said quietly to one of the maids, and then as the nurse stared on, crestfallen and offended, she tried to explain:

"To-morrow we shall be able to talk it over—perhaps we shall then be able to send for some one else, but if you prefer to stay you can do so—meanwhile I am here to help, and you can tell me what there is to do."

"But," gasped the discomfited nurse, "if anything should go wrong with my case—if the doctors should blame *me*—"

"Oh you need not be afraid—nothing will go wrong—and you must be sorely in need of rest. *I* have had my sleep—*I* shall be able to go on," said Zina, the awkwardness of the situation making her voice strained and cold.

There was no time for her to explain further, and there was nothing to show that her sympathies were all with the aggrieved woman, who resented the manner in which she had been treated and was inclined to impute the worst motives to every member of the heathenish family.

Finally the matter was settled, but not for Zina's happiness. It was no comfort to be installed in a difficult post, with the sense that the nurse was inclined to be aggressive, and that her eyes were often fixed on her with a resentful meaning which aggravated her nervousness.

CHAPTER IX.

OVER-WROUGHT.

It was an uncomfortable state of things, but one which could not be avoided. It was but natural that the nurse—who from this time felt as if she had lost the glory of the case which had been entrusted to her—should be angry and jealous; but her feeling of animosity would have been lessened if she could have guessed how the daughter of the house was shrinking from her task. Zina was too highly-strung and too impressionable for the fatigue and responsibility, and yet she had been wont to pride herself on her physical strength.

Whenever she flagged, or whenever the doctor pleaded with her not to over-exert herself, he found her deaf to reason, nerving herself to do her duty.

After all she was compelled to recognise the truth of Eva's words—that she was not one of those women who have a faculty for nursing, and who have a sort of enjoyment in patient endurance, and self-denying pleasures.

The long confinement in the sick-room, and the days which she had spent in solitude—unconsciously chafing and irritating her wound—were beginning to tell on a nervous system always sensitive, and upon feelings which were exceptionally acute. The vivacity of her imagination, ever ready to create scenes for her which were not real, was now equally ready to conjure up morbid illusions. At one time she would be flagellant of herself, calling herself unnatural for having brooded over her wrongs, or for having made much of that little drama in which her insurgency had played so important a part. She

would tell herself that it was her revolt against parental authority, and her unnatural defiance which had led to the retribution of this serious illness. At such times she would reproach herself for her habit of resting with pleasure on the one bright spot in the present darkness—the thought of her young lover's devotion. It seemed to her a sort of treachery to allow herself to think, "By and bye, when I am no longer bound by my duty to my father, I shall be able to marry Stephen Dewe."

She was ashamed of the feeling of hidden joy at the bottom of her heart and the sudden lightening of her trouble whenever she thought of the future.

Her very horror of the dark thing which seemed to be hovering in the house tormented her with sensational nervousness—a nervousness aggravated by the knowledge that the death of her father would set her free to marry the man, to whom she had plighted her troth.

In some curious metaphysical controversies in which Stuart Newbolt's friends had taken part—controversies which had acted unfortunately on a girl of her imaginative nature, she had heard much of irresistible impulses and had once herself joined in a discussion as to whether in the depths of each of us there might not be lurking more selves than one, whose shifting equilibrium might constitute the real self.

In her present state of mental welfare—a state of tension and excitement resulting from the internal conflict of the last few weeks, she was thinking in a terrified way of thwarted tendencies which might revenge themselves on the better ones.

Later on, she blamed herself for not having sent for Mary Carruthers, but it was impossible just then to make a confidante of anyone. Probably the "breadwinner of the Carruthers' family" did not know the full extent of Mr. Newbolt's illness, and the little woman had always been fearful of intruding on the magnificence of Chester-Square, whilst Zina,

humouring her fancy, had made a rule of visiting her in the ugly lodgings which were so inexpressibly florid in their decoration.

It was unfortunate; for Mary with her plain common-sense, and strong faith in the Unseen would have been able to help the girl, who had a strange yearning after the Christian ideal, and hated herself for the evil thoughts which seemed to hold carnival within her during those silent hours in the lonely nights when she was forced to take her turn at the nursing—crouching in the arm-chair as if she were famished for warmth, and looking at the sleeping man with a spiritless, nerveless, dejected, and almost purposeless gaze. Hateful and distressing thoughts they were, in which, for the first time, it was suggested to her that an engagement prolonged indefinitely would probably be never fulfilled, and that such a prolonged engagement would be a drag on any man, rather likely to hinder him than to promote his success in life. Stephen had continued to write

to her in a passionate, feverish strain, blaming himself on the one hand for the want of self-control which had led him to commit himself so suddenly by impulsive speech, and declaring on the other that as her father was so ill, and could not know what was taking place, there was surely nothing to prevent him from coming to her *now.* Had she been a little older, or better able to reason in her present distress, she would have seen that he was inconsequent, illogical, confessing that his passion had betrayed him and that he must take the consequences, and yet attempting to force an interview now that her father was unable to interfere.

"I will write back to him again, and tell him that he must wait—we must both wait—even if it be for years."

"You know that is nonsense—if anything were to happen to your father you would *not* have to wait."

She was certainly ridiculously nervous, for the

words seemed to be spoken to her by a voice from without.

She stopped her ears so that she should not listen to it.

Till now it seemed to her she had been in a childish Elysium, not aware of the coverts in her own intelligence in which shy thoughts could hide away even from her own ken, and unconscious of the moral shock, convulsing her very being, which had come upon her in consequence of Mrs. Capern's idle chatter, or of the minute filaments in her memory which connected this chatter with her own experience in actual fact. Who could tell how far her father had been to blame even with regard to her mother's early death—a foreigner treated with cruelty by a man who was still handsome, young, rich, brilliantly gifted, ambitious, and chafing against the tie which bound him to a wife supposed to destroy his prestige in the society ready to adore him? Who could tell whether his system of neglect might

not have hastened her mother's death? The subtle emotions which actuate men, and the complex moves which those men may make, are more difficult as we advance in so-called civilisation. Alas for the love which he had crushed out in more cases than one! Alas for the tender affection she might have had from her mother! Alas for the education which he had given to herself, to make her subservient to his will, never reckoning on the counter-influences of circumstances and temperament!

Just then the sleeper turned in his sleep. He opened his eyes and asked for water. It was the time to give him his medicine, and, as he looked round anxiously and asked for it, there was a wildness, not only in the large grey eyes themselves, but in the whole expression of the face, which struck Zina with a sort of conviction that it must be his *real* expression; and that the smiling, half-bantering look which he kept up not only in society, but generally in the presence of his daughter and his

own servants, was a mask by which he hid the real harsh, egotistical self.

He did not ask his daughter if she were tired, but spoke to her in few words with a sort of insistence. It was a part, no doubt, of her overstrained condition which made her conscious for the instant of a sort of recoil, for which she loathed herself—a feeling of distrust almost bordering on aversion for the man who, in his intense selfishness, had dismissed her lover, angrily forbidding the match without giving any satisfactory reason. Her admiration, almost worship, for her father's intellect had aways been far greater than her love for him, and her affection for Stephen had had something of a mother's love in it. She had discerned the weaknesses of his artistic nature, hoping with her own stronger character to shield him from the realities of life. But she did not wonder that he chafed bitterly at a lifelong separation which seemed to be enforced by the egotism of another.

"There can be no possible reason why we should not be allowed to see each other. Surely we could wait in patience, and I might be of use to you in your present anxiety," he had said in a letter which but half an hour before she had held in her hand.

But Zina knew better, knew that her father expected everyone to yield invariable subservience to his will, and that, though he had not given any distinct reason for his refusal, the years would not change him; she had never yet known him change any resolution.

Once more all her soul was up in arms against him, and then instantly she remembered that he was very ill, just in that state in which something terrible might happen, and that if she were to allow herself to speak to, or think disrespectfully of him, she might never forgive herself.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SICK-ROOM.

ANOTHER week passed. Zina had ceased to take any count of time. All her thoughts were intent on the father who might be drifting away from her, and who kept his face turned away from her, so occupied with his own illness that she could not judge if he were better or worse. The doctors in attendance differed in their opinions, and she was alternately in a state of hopefulness and dejection, exhausted by her own conjectures.

She had written to Stephen to forbid him to

attempt to see her, reminding him how her father's illness had begun with an exciting scene, and how since then he had seemed to go down-hill from bad to worse; how he could only talk of his sufferings or look at her as if he reproached her, so that she shuddered at the thought of anything which might widen the breach which had already taken place between them.

Sometimes Stuart Newbolt would groan and toss his arms about. Then he would wander a little in his talk, his thoughts dwelling on the past.

It was hard that he should still refuse to be waited upon during the night by the nurse. For he was difficult to please. And when Zina rose to give him his medicine he seemed always to be reminded of the immediate cause of his illness. She fancied that his glance lighted on her with a sort of suspicion, and when he asked in the thick speech caused by illness, "You have not seen this fellow —or had any communication with him?" the thought

crossed her mind in a more direct form than before, "If my father were to die this farce would cease, and I should be free to act out my own life."

This time she was in despair. For there was no voice. The wicked idea pure and simple seemed to come from within; there could no longer be any chance of deceiving herself.

She trembled and sat down, feeling as if her limbs refused to bear her; no doubt she was weak from her constant attendance on the sick man. She was not even aware that she had left his question unanswered, as she awoke with a shudder to the recognition of the fact that she had anticipated—almost wished, though only for a moment, for her father's death.

Had any doctor, or any clergyman, practised in reading character, been able to look into her heart, or any psychologist skilled ever so slightly in understanding the morbid tricks of an excitable imagination unable to shake off a melancholy caused by

a habit of reserve; or had she herself been freer from the strange suggestive thoughts and emotions which had haunted her from her youth upwards, she would have known that what she needed was more sleep, and plenty of fresh air. But she had no one to warn her to resist a mental habit, which if aggravated would become like a disease.

She had no sense of exaggeration in accusing herself of having wished for her father's death. It was untrue—she wronged herself when she reflected at the same moment that the next step downward might have been—murder! To desire, to even contemplate, a fellow-creature's death with the idea of the advantage which might accrue to oneself was, according to that ideal Christianity which she had discussed so often with Mary Carruthers, nothing less than murder itself—the wish was the same as the act. Neither was there anyone to assure her that she had seized upon the sterner side of the Christian creed, or to remind her that she was outraging

nature when she still undertook more than her fair share of work during the weary watches of the next few nights, not perceiving the increasing jealousy of the professional nurse, who had become lynx-eyed to Miss Newbolt's eccentricities, and not knowing that by her very assiduity she was heightening her morbid condition, without succeeding in quieting the conscience which had so suddenly been aroused.

The doctors had ordered her father laudanum to lull the pain from which he suffered, and it often became a part of Zina's duty to measure out the doses. She would willingly have evaded this duty, but though the invalid was still morose and irritable in his manner to everyone, he seemed less and less willing to allow her out of his sight.

Her natural character did not assert itself under the crisis, and more than one of the medical men saw the quick, spasmodic movement with which she tried to bear up as she leant over the sick man,

who would have no arms but hers around him in his contortions of agony. She did not let it embarrass her, though in his delirium he talked against her. Only when it was stormy weather and the night winds were howling round the house, striking weird melodies from the harmonica-wires of the wind-harp, which in happier days she had put up outside the window, did she break into tears and cry, "He is not so bad. He is only like other people when they are ill, with a longing to pick a quarrel with somebody or other, and have it out with somebody supposed to have offended them. I myself have felt just like that—the people who speak against him are calumniators and liars."

Yet when the morning came, and the doctors went on giving her hope, she was too exhausted to know if she were glad, and the weary self-reproaches would begin over again. And when the time came round for pouring out his dose, the old tormenting voice seemed to whisper into her ear,

"If—if—he were never to awaken from this sleep!"

Whence came this hair-splitting tendency this want of balance, this ridiculous subtlety?

Could she help the picture conjured up by her vivid imagination in the twinkling of an eye? The involuntary tricks played by this morbid imagination were a part of the temperament which might have made her a heroine or a martyr. It was not her own thought, as she had sense enough to perceive — it was hateful, barbarous, loathsome—it must have been transmitted to her from the savage instincts of some half-civilised ancestors. Her training had taught her to disbelieve in any bad influence from without, in any diabolic flashes of thought flung across her own half-sleeping consciousness; and yet she would have been glad to think that this haunting terror did not originate from her own will, thankful to fling it away from her as diabolic.

She hesitated, her fingers trembled, so unwilling was she to pour out the dose. But it had to be

given, and after it he sank as usual into a troubled sleep. When he woke again his mind seemed to be quite hazy. There was nothing more to cause excitement, no trouble, no anxious questionings of any kind, and once more she asked herself if there could be really any chance of recovery, and wondered vaguely if he were to die as he had lived.

At one moment she had nearly yielded to a pressing impulse to drop down on her knees by her father's bedside.

She felt that it would ease her surcharged heart, and that there would be something quieting in the attitude of prayer, but she asked herself to whom she was to kneel, repelling the impulse and hiding her face in the bedclothes with a shuddering cry. Old recollections, old thoughts of her childhood, of her father's former tenderness to her, rather than his later irritation, crowded upon her and prompted her to pray; for Zina had been born to be an enthusiast, and had been drawn at one time to all that was primeval

and essential in Christianity. And though the formulæ had been given up, the mysticism still remained. In the old days there would have been the making of a saint about this woman—now, only a bitter questioning, a vacuity and darkness troubled her.

She began to have a nervous terror of that other watcher who often insisted on staying in the room, who again hinted that *she* should be blamed if anything went wrong with her case. "Case—" that was what her father was called. It struck Zina once more with that touch of humour which had more of pain in it than amusement that he was simply "a case", even when she caught the nurse's eyes fixed on hers with a meaning which she did not fathom or even try to understand. So all her thoughts were fixed on that life which was hanging by a thread, and in the silence which thrilled her during the awful hours of the night she was conscious again of that agony of compunction for the fact that this illness had begun after a quarrel—the

first serious quarrel between herself and her father.

Every sense seemed to be intensified, every sound, every sight; but the thought that the nurse's unfriendly eyes were fixed upon her would as effectually have restrained her from prayer as that other thought which was just then pressing its icy fingers on her heart, that she was brought face to face with inviolable laws to which it was her duty to try to adjust herself—laws as awful as the awful reality of the Unknowable.

The patient slept again more heavily than before, but he stirred and muttered in his sleep, as a gust of memory swept over him. They bent down to hear what he said—he was muttering of his gambling debts.

CHAPTER XI.

TOO LATE.

THE poor girl never afterwards forgot those hours of watching. It was several nights since she had gone to bed, and she had almost left off feeling the natural inclination to sleep. But her nerves were overstrained, and her senses still exaggerated every sight and sound. The loud ticking of the clock on the stairs and the feebler pulse of the watch on the table of the room, each grated on her senses and seemed to keep time with the subtle questions which she was unable to answer—

subtle and ridiculous questions which might have been suggested to her by sinister beings bent on hurting her. The lamp, like the great haunting eye of some uncanny Cyclops, stared at her through the darkness.

It did not supply sufficient light in the room for her to see her father's face, had he not turned it away from observation as he habitually did.

But she was certain that she saw the sharpened profile on the pillow, and could picture him to herself dead, so that never another word from her could reach him. She felt inclined to cry out, but restrained herself as a matter of duty, so impressed was she with the idea that soon, very soon, her father would be gone and she no longer able to communicate with him, though they had much to say to each other.

She did utter a cry when towards the morning Stuart Newbolt opened his heavy eyes, but it was quite plain that he no longer saw his daughter,

neither did he hear. He looked at her with an infantile smile; it was indeed too late for any further intercourse now.

"Too late!" she repeated to herself, recognising the futility of human effort, crushed and overwhelmed by it, as both women attempted in vain to rouse the sick man from that fatal inclination to sleep.

"The effect of the draught should have passed off now, if he did not take more than he ought to have taken during the night," muttered the nurse, loud enough for Zina to hear her.

But Zina heard nothing. The re-action had come; she was too tired to take in any definite idea. Afterwards she remembered that she tottered, and would have fallen had not somebody stretched out a hand to help her. Once indeed she caught herself talking out loud a sort of delirious nonsense; but she did not know that she was saying strange things about herself. A sort of dull apathy seemed to have taken possession of *her* as well as of the

man by whose sick-bed they were watching.

Neither did she see the expression of the other woman's face. She only saw that dying face, with the blank look of the eyes whenever they succeeded in rousing him for a moment—a look as if the soul had put up its shutters to concentrate all its efforts on the struggle which was being waged within. She suddenly remembered once to have heard her father say in one of his sarcastic moods, that he did not like the idea of death, and he believed that in their secret hearts most men were cowards about it; but that he hoped by the study of natural science to prolong his own life to that period of senile decay, when there would be nothing to feel and nothing to encounter. She recalled that speech with a shudder just now. For, if there was mortal conflict going on behind those blank eyes which looked so much like closed shutters, why should she speak to disturb the soul which was settling itself to rest? To *rest?* To the eternal sleep of which he had so often spoken,

dying out like a vegetable? She could not reconcile it with her other ideas that there *might* be such things as eternal principles, of which outward appearances were only the accidental and fleeting forms.

She was so absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not notice the nurse's indignant astonishment, as she said in a low tone, "Do not vex him—do not disturb him—let him rest."

The doctors came with their low-toned questions, and she could gather that they were surprised, especially the younger and cleverer of them, who had been the most sanguine of the two, and had throughout given hope of Stuart Newbolt's recovery. She saw them examining the bottle with the laudanum, but, even then, she did not know that there would be no awakening for her father, that all was over, and that he had actually died since he had taken his last dose. She was so thoroughly worn out that she was only conscious of an awful stillness, a hushed period of waiting, and then—as they

suggested that she should go to her room—of the trees in the square melting by degrees into the pale grey of the evening light, till their outlines became like everything else, shadowy and indistinct. One of the maids came to her and suggested that she should take a cup of tea, being evidently much astonished that Miss Newbolt had not drawn down her window-blinds.

The apparent zeal of the servants grated on her feelings. What right had *they* to make such a fuss—they to whom he had never really belonged? Why should they shed tears when her eyelids were dry? She insisted on redraping the bed on which they had laid out the corpse; she persuaded herself that she would make it look less ghastly if she arranged some lace round the pillows.

What, she asked herself, was the use of the outward mourning and all the paraphernalia of crape with the anodyne of fashion-books which the dressmakers were already sending, when it was the soul

alone which mourned? And why did they want to close the windows, and make the atmosphere hot and stuffy?

"It's not respectable-like for her to sit in that way, staring right in front of her, and not shedding a tear," reported her maid in the servants' hall, which just then was thronged with gossips, as none of the servants were performing their ordinary work, and everyone's usual avocation seemed to be gone.

She did not take the tea, she did not lie down, and she did not weep, for all her passionate feelings were focussed on one subject.

She had never till now thought seriously about death, nor allowed herself to feel that it would not be worth while to face the present existence if there were not another life. But she was overcome by the presence of the white face on the pillow—the Thing which had once been her father, but which now seemed no longer to have any part in her.

The Why, the Whence, and the Where came upon her with overwhelming force, and she was unable to give them an answer.

"How feeble *he* would have called me," she thought as she turned away from the corpse, "how often have I heard him say that we have no more right than the molecule to protest against being merged in the whole."

Then came the recollection of Stephen Dewe. Was it worth while to love any creature, any human being, and to expend the very essence of one's soul, drop by drop, when after all came death, and love might end in—*nothing?*

But was it possible that Life could end—*end*—that one, so palpitating with it and its hopes and fears as she had been till lately, could exist no longer? She sat down, with her head in her feverish hands, and found the problem unthinkable, as many a woman has found it before her—then derided herself for her childish egotism. Had she not been

equally silly when, as a little girl, she had been puzzled to conceive of the world going on before she was born?

She laughed at her own absurdity. And yet if there were no future life, nothing to reward one after all—then why all this nerve-suffering, why all this complex civilisation? Let life be natural and simple, let men and women enjoy themselves to their finger-tips! She hoped that there was an answer to this heathen philosophy, more satisfactory than the blind optimism which was fainting and sinking when it ought to have sustained her; she had always recognised the necessity for righteousness and love—the altruism which considers the feelings and well-being of others, and which trained her to the habit of trying to understand things as they were, and express them without exaggeration. If the corpse which dinted the bedclothes with solemn outlines in the same house could arise and speak to her, would it not say, as *he* often had said, "Zina, do not get into that

foolish feminine habit of exaggerating your feelings."

And yet, as the sparrows flew past her window, and as the outlines of the trees grew dimmer in the square, they seemed to say to her,

"Oh, foolish mortal, why do you wear yourself out for nothing? The beautiful sunlight has gone, and the peace of the summer days. You have let them all pass, you have thrown your treasures from you. And now the winter will soon be on you, and you will weep in the days which are dark and sullen, and soon death may come, and nothing will be left to you."

The next day was like a passing medley of shadows, with only a break now and then, and surprise following closely on the heels of surprise.

There were the usual influx of cards, and the usual condolences of friends which seemed to her so trite and miserably commonplace. Then there was the necessary investigation of her father's affairs—the

tearing up of his letters and the strange papers he had left behind him—strange notes of a strange mind—strange intricacies of a most unusual life.

And, finding some leaves of a diary left in his desk which seemed to throw rather an odd and unexpected light on some of the gossip retailed to her by Eva Capern, she thought it better to send at once for the family lawyer. He came, a grave and astute man, whom she had known from her childhood, kind withal but not encouraging. How *could* he encourage her when it appeared, after a little inquiry, that Stuart Newbolt had indeed eaten up his fortune, leaving nothing for the descendants who might possibly come after him? Scarcely enough to pay the servants would be left out of the wreck. Years before he had invested in a company which ensured him at first 20 per cent interest; then, as the interest decreased, he had sunk more and more of his hundreds with the hope of gaining as large a profit for his capital as before. Suddenly most of his

profits had ceased, but he had indemnified himself for his losses by sinking the rest of his capital in purchasing a handsome annuity for his lifetime. Everything that he had had died with him, and though he had taken the pains to write a letter in which he blamed the specious swindling companies which play havoc with a man's capital by offering ruinous interest, no one could have known better than himself that the will which he left behind him was as worthless as waste paper.

Zina received the announcement as coldly and unconcernedly as if it had not affected herself. *This* then was what her father had kept in reserve, and what he had often longed to tell her. Probably, as she said to herself, making excuses for the dead, he had some well-planned scheme for her own benefit which made him object to her marriage with Stephen. Whatever it was, it would be locked up now in the silence of the grave, and, if other people did not think him excusable they were wrong;

they had no right to judge him for a miscalculation, an error in arithmetic, which could scarcely be deemed a crime. When his moral laxity in questions of debit and credit became more evident she still refused to blame him, and though she winced a little to think how the respect inclining to servility which people had hitherto paid to his money would suddenly disappear, and how the full odium of the miserable state of things must fall upon herself, she smiled at the remembrance that Stephen Dewe would be ready to protect her.

Her vivid imagination was ready to picture the humiliations and vexations which would be sure to follow in a few days; how some of the clever journalists would pen pungent and witty sentences at the expense of the name of Newbolt, and how scornfully they would descant on the pretensions of this new adventurer who had made such a successful assault on the fortress of London society, seeming for a time as if he would take it by storm.

Well, what did it matter? If Stephen hurried the marriage as he was sure to do, she would soon be changing the name of Newbolt—the great thing which mattered was that none of these things could vex her father now!

CHAPTER XII.

CAN HE DISTRUST HER?

EVA CAPERN had been wonderfully sparing of her visits since her guardian's illness had become more serious, and the world had begun to talk.

Her admitted objection to everything which was "unpleasant", an objection which Stuart Newbolt had done his best to inculcate, had made her fight shy of the house during that period of breathless interest, that hush in the drama of Life, which almost always takes place where Death is expected to take possession. In the beginning she had taken

the illness lightly, but at the first serious alarm had made up her mind that it would end fatally, and had never shared in the sanguine forecast of either the nurse or the more cheerful doctor. And now she absented herself on the score of delicate health. Zina resented her heartlessness on her father's account; for, whatever other duty he might have failed to discharge, Stuart Newbolt had never been found wanting in his position of faithfulness towards his ward. Again she congratulated herself that she would be free of Eva in the future, with no need for Mrs. Capern's help, or her patronising ways, for Stephen Dewe could only be waiting for the first few hours of her bereavement to pass before he presented himself as her affianced lover. Ah, what a good thing that she had Stephen who would not allow Eva Capern to worry her by transgressing the bounds of politeness in the familiarity of her questioning; what a comforting thing that Stephen was simple-minded, and had none of the aristocratic

tricks of manner which she loathed in some of the men her father had wanted her to marry! What a shock of disgust those men would have had when they came to know all about her, her father, and her poor mother! What a mercy she had refused to marry them! But Stephen was so different, to whom she would never be slavishly bound by mysterious obligations, founded on financial considerations! The thought of him came to her with a sense of rest, emotion, and even gratitude. She had never yet rushed into his arms, never yet wept upon his bosom, but had he come to her then, when her heart was full to bursting, she would probably have given vent to her pent-up emotions. It never occurred to her to think how they were to support themselves. Hitherto she had been so free from the biting vexations and cankering cares of poverty that she scarcely troubled to ask herself if Stephen Dewe had enough for both of them.

The middle of the day came, the lawyer had gone.

He was well stricken in years, and Zina had not hesitated to tell him that he need not be solicitous about her future, for that she was on the eve of her marriage with a man to whom she had been for some time engaged. He was of opinion that sufficient would be left from the annuity to enable her to wind up her father's affairs, and already she had sent for the servants and given them their dismissal. The interview with the nurse she deferred till the last, for she had never thoroughly liked the woman, who now announced her intention of waiting for the funeral. Zina was equally determined that she should not wait, but in getting rid of her she counted on Stephen Dewe's assistance.

The afternoon wore on, and Stephen Dewe did not come. She went up into her room and tried to calm herself by lying down, but finding it impossible to keep still, she rose and fell into her old habit of walking for the hour together, restlessly, aimlessly, up and down, up and down the floor—

waiting, waiting, though she did not like to say so to herself. Never before in all her life had she to acknowledge to herself that she was waiting—and for a *man*—who did not come!

Many already had been the inquiries at the street-door, but surely Stephen should have been the first. Whatever business he might chance to have should have been put aside at once, when she, whom he loved, was in need of assistance. Perhaps he, too, had heard some of the unkind gossip. She put the thought aside as an outrageous one, which only roused her laughter. For if she was inclined to ponder a little as to what *some* folk, for whose opinion she might care, might say about the crash which had come into her life and her sudden disappearance, as that of a sort of female pretender, from Chester-Square, she had only smiled at her own egotism, reminding herself that she and her belongings were not the only people in the world, and that a "nine days wonder" about them signified

very little. If it mattered little to them, how much less to Stephen, who was ready to take everything on his own broad shoulders, and who cared as little as she did for mere tittle-tattle.

At last the darkness fell—the darkness of the summer night, preceded by a long period of twilight, and then she started up suddenly. But the rap did not come to announce Mr. Dewe. The nurse, whom she had tried to forget, did not wait to be welcomed in. She came in aggressively, with a strange look on her face, which was unusually white.

It occurred to Zina that she had perhaps failed in her duty in not offering the woman a glass of wine. She spoke her thought aloud, taking up the keys, and determining to order some of the best port which her father's cellar contained.

But, to her surprise, the nurse shrank back with a shrewd look upon her pallid face. She announced her resolution of taking neither bread nor sup again in that house, and of hastening away from it as soon

as it were possible to do so; and Zina turned cold, while the beads of perspiration stood on her forehead, as the woman went on to tell her for the first time that the doctor, who had thought his patient would recover, had not hesitated to hint that the nurse in attendance had probably given him too much laudanum.

"How *could* he be so unfair to you? Of course you set it right. Why, it was *I* who gave him the two last doses of opium. He would not let you come near him, still less pour out his medicine. We did not even venture to tell him that you were behind the screen in his room," faltered Zina, the old agony returning to her, as the old morbid idea again took possession of her brain, and she once more remembered a sophistical argument, which she had even heard her father himself maintain—that a wish often leads to an unconscious act. "It was *I* who gave it, but I dropped it out with the greatest care."

"I told them you would say so; they always say they have taken the greatest care," retorted the woman in an insolent voice.

"Whom do you mean by *they?* or *them?*" asked Zina in a low voice.

"Dr. Melton and the tall fair gentleman who called in the afternoon, and would not let you be disturbed," answered the nurse, evading the first question. "The lawyer had told the servants that the fair young gentleman was to be admitted, and he came in when I was having high words with the doctor. No doubt it is all a mistake; these things generally are. But the gentleman stood in the hall —he must have overheard—for he burst right in upon us, and said he could answer for your carefulness in sick nursing. Carefulness or not, I am sorry to have to say it, but I have been insulted and interfered with ever since I entered this house, and leave it I will—the sooner the better; there's a curse hanging over the place."

The angry woman stopped suddenly in her excited speech. She was a worthy woman, and it was not her fault that being unimaginative she took things too literally, or that a long apprenticeship in the sick-room had lessened rather then intensified her sympathies; not her fault if nature had denied the proper amount of oil necessary for the gracious working of her spiritual machinery. She had intended to do her duty, but the sight of Miss Newbolt staring at her long and fixedly, evidently trying to collect her thoughts, failing to do so, and yet shrinking visibly as she began to understand, brought her suddenly to the recollection of possible consequences. For the nurse had never before come in contact with such speaking eyes, never guessed that there could be such power of expression in any human countenance. It was *her* turn to shrink as those innocent eyes blazed upon her, and the true character of their owner became transparent as that of a child.

"Sometimes when people are a little overdone, they scarcely know what they are doing—perhaps that was the case with you last night," she stammered, trying to take back her imputation.

Years afterwards it all came back to Zina in a calmer mood.

How the woman—indignant at the imputation on her own management—might not have intended any special meaning to be attached to her words.

They had, none of them, any comprehension of Miss Newbolt's shivering sensitiveness, nor how it was that a suspicion born in her own imagination and suddenly taking shape, could smite her like a deadly missile. It was strange how it had never occurred to her to think that the nurse in her blind anger might have been heedless of what she said, not meaning half of it, or animated only by a childish desire to sting and irritate. Had she not been living in an atmosphere of perpetual apprehension, where the merest whisper swelled into reality and

intensity, as if it had travelled through a speaking tube, Zina knew afterwards that the foolish imputation would have been powerless to injure.

But just then she could not reason. Just then it was more natural for it to flash upon her that the nurse, who had doubtless seen many strange things in different houses, in the various experiences of her difficult cases, might have formed a theory of her own—a theory not actually likely to hurt her, since it had probably been a part of her training to learn to keep a quiet tongue in her head, and if she as well as the family doctor came in sometimes for strange chapters in life, those strange chapters would not be revealed. What else could the woman mean? She was certainly no adept at insinuating rather than speaking, as Eva Capern might have done, with pretty gesture and waves of the hand. And the bewildered girl's brain was still incapable of reasoning.

"Go—go—I—cannot understand what you mean—

and even if I could, I should refuse to discuss it with you," she stammered in her agitation and perplexity, pointing to the door. "Do you not see that I am ill? I was never like this before. How cold I am!"

Her teeth were chattering, her whirling thoughts lapsing into chaos, and before the nurse could obey her order, her head fell forward as if she were half asleep, and in another moment she lay unconscious on the floor.

It was more than an hour afterwards, between eleven and twelve o'clock, when Stephen Dewe stood again at the door of the house in Chester-Square.

The darkness had grown deeper, but the stars had taken their places like silent sentinels in the sky, the Bear, Orion, Cassiopeia, and the Milky Way, shining over the great city which lay stretched like a shapeless mass beneath.

But the innumerable starry points of the dusky sky had at that moment no message for him, any more than for the unhappy girl, who had been

trained to look at them as only a "brilliant eruption" on the firmament, containing no blissful spot, and no possible home where the weary and ill-treated would find a refuge after death.

She had recovered from her transitory faintness, and in the craving of her heart for human tenderness, had determined to put silly pride on one side, and was listening with beating heart for her lover's footstep—he who would protect her from all indignity, watch over her, and decide for her in difficulties which seemed to be too serious for one person to settle! For she could not reason as yet—her sense of degradation excluding all other and more natural ideas—or perhaps she might have thought twice as to the wisdom of appealing to Stephen Dewe when the world about her seemed to be topsy-turvy.

The rest of the world was going on as if nothing was turned upside down, or in any way affected by the craziness within her.

A carriage bringing some elegantly dressed women from the theatre was standing at the next door, the jingling of the reins as the coachman drove away, blending with the sound of dance-music from a piano a few doors further off, and reminding Stephen that, in spite of the event which had just happened, the London season—that strange orgie of refined rioting—was still in full swing, and that he still continued to inhabit the wealthiest, the poorest, the cleverest and the stupidest, the gayest and the saddest city on this globe.

It was with much anxiety and some sinking of the heart that he inquired again for Zina. It was true that he had been to the house once before to comfort her in her loneliness after her father's death, and that he had overheard the nurse's gossip —true also that he found himself unable to sleep or to rest at any distance from Zina without inquiring for further news.

He had no expectation of seeing her, and he told

himself afterwards that nothing in all his life had *amazed* him so much as that she should have broken through all the usual conventional rules by coming down to him at that hour.

The light dazzled her; she had been so long in the sick-room that she seemed at first scarcely to understand whose was the dark figure, which stood awaiting her in the hall.

She drew him into the study. There was something weird and terrifying in her pallid beauty, with the eyes dark and deep, which gave character to her face. He gazed at her in astonishment.

Paracelsus was wont to describe an experiment in which a flower perished; you burnt it; whatever was left of the original flower was dispersed—you knew not whither and no efforts could re-constitute it. But the power of chemistry—according to Paracelsus—enabled you to raise a spectrum from the burnt dust of the flower, just as it appeared in life. It is not necessary for us to vouch—as the elder

Disraeli did—for the credibility of such an idea. It is sufficient to say that in the human being it sometimes seems as if the soul may have escaped like the essence of such a flower, and the appearance which remains has an unreality like the spectrum. It was as if the real Zina had gone.

She had been the woman whom he revered, whom he worshipped with pure devotion, who had climbed to the heights of human intelligence and preserved all the purity of a child, in whom the head and heart had seemed to be alike developed —that rare combination in a woman. She had been more than human to him before, but she was less than human now, with the horrible imputation contained in that uncanny talk sounding in his ears, and the change in her own appearance seeming to give a sinister importance to that chatter. He was sorry for her, pitiful, when he thought of the way in which she had been brought up; but he was a young man of critical as well as artistic nature, and at that

moment he felt as if she could never be to him again the idol he had worshipped.

He tried to speak, but the twitching mouth inadvertently betrayed him. Yet something passed between them in the effort of those one or two words which did not need speech, the *sound*, as it were, of the sentiment which conveyed a physical as well as a mental impression to her delicate nerves. It was one of those moments which do not easily repeat themselves in life, and which, if they did, would make the effort of living impossible.

His sudden terror was as real to her as if he had vulgarly accused her, forcing his want of trust, brutally, down her throat. And in one instant she had recovered herself. "Go! go! I cannot speak to you now. I am too much upset," she said, forgetful that she herself had summoned him but the moment before. Then she tottered towards the door, sparing of her regrets or her farewells, determined to exert her will to the uttermost, lest her fainting at-

tack should repeat itself. For the unexpected attitude of the man on whom she had relied had the effect upon her of a cold douche– the possibility that he could feel distrustful about her for a moment brought her to her senses.

Alone in the room by her father's corpse, she sat up during the silent hours of the night pale and indignant, no longer absent-minded and pre-occupied, no longer a prey to morbid thoughts.

The want of anything like real imagination in Stephen Dewe's case, when the illuminating power of music could not come to his assistance, which had so little prepared him for something unusual in her character—something out of the common beat—even if it were overstrained and morbid, roused her to self-defence and a healthier re-action. Again and again during the hours of the night she occupied herself with going over and over her past. She who had always till now been self-reliant and never needed a mother, and who had been just old enough,

when her mother died, to realise that she and her father had little in common, now racked her brain to remember the episodes of her childhood. Memory had filched away much that was precious, but she could recall the proud looks and airs of infallibility with which her father had indignantly reprobated her mother's Catholic teaching, himself an apostle of free thought, content with his official ordnance map of the infinite Universe in which he lived. She had a half-pathetic and half-humorous recollection of her mother's great belief in her daughter's superior brain-power, and of how little she had interfered with her unless her interference was necessary. In the old days she had thought a little scornfully of that poor crushed mother, telling herself that she had no admiration for those compliant, no-charactered women, who swamped their own habits and opinions in those of their husbands. But now she found herself, to her astonishment, calling upon her for help, when she did not know to whom to call,

with that sense of the eerie which makes us shiver at the consciousness of mere disembodied wills and intelligences in a possibly invisible world of which we have not the key.

"O mother, whom I slighted till I lost you, never guessing at the intense aching of your heart while you patiently waited! O father, who treated her so coldly and strangely, but whose intellect was so keen that it did not seem as if it *could* die! Do either of you see me now? Was it from either of you that I inherited this gift for puzzling and tormenting myself? Speak to me if you can, speak, and let me know, if you exist, that there is a future life in which the injustices and misunderstandings of this one will be set right," she cried as she stretched herself by the side of the corpse.

Was it nothing which responded to her aspiration —to her cry for help in her emergency? Would it be of any use for her to have recourse to what other people called prayer?

In the morning she was delirious—the doctors spoke of brain fever, and Stephen Dewe was in constant attendance. Her voice could be heard outside the door of her room, and there were moments when his anxiety was suspended by a new and strange curiosity. For the sick girl was accusing herself in her ravings, the women servants listening open-mouthed and frightened. He sent them downstairs with the assurance by which he attempted to brace his own mind, that sick people in this condition always harped on things which were farthest from the truth. Not the less was he impatient, fidgetting up and down the passage, stopping his ears that he might not hear, and then standing still and unconsciously listening in his stupefaction.

Again and again there were iterations of the same dreary complaints—her father's coldness, and his attempts to separate her from her lover. And then she harped on the hours of nursing, and the possibility of the medicine having been administered too

carelessly. There was still nothing tangible for his dread to lay hold of, but the fact that he had fears was betrayed by his ashen—no longer love-glorified—face.

One day when he had meant to ask if she were asleep, that he might just look in on her, or leave her a message to be given should she wake, that gnawing fear got the better of him. The quirks of memory distracted him for it came back to him in a way he would rather have forgotten that he too had dwelt impatiently on the fact of how the father's life stood in the way of the marriage.

The whole prospect seemed to have undergone some gruesome change—it was no longer pleasant to him—the associations had spoiled it. He was no longer chafing feverishly at the inaction rendered necessary by her illness, or questioning the nurses hoarsely as to how soon she would be well enough to see him.

She had ordered him to go, and, as she repeated these entreaties that he should go in agonised tones

of voice which resounded through the silent house, he determined to take her at her word—and go abroad —at least for a time.

He left a letter to tell her, that as the doctors had assured him it was necessary for her to be kept very quiet, and an interview with him would be only likely to upset her even in convalescence, he had determined to immolate his own happiness on the altar of self-sacrifice. He felt a brute, and was not contented with his own wretched platitudes when he had written them, being haunted by the drawn misery of her pinched, unconscious face, still tussling with forces stronger than herself. But it was true enough that they had assured him she was already better, and would be likely to recover more quickly in his absence.

"It is all different," he said, "and will be always different for me *now*. And who am I;" he added to himself, "to insist on tormenting her with my presence?"

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CHAPTER XIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHEN Zina recovered from her interval of delirium, it was to find that the funeral was over, and that all that was mortal of Stuart Newbolt had been carried, not without parade, to the grave. The world had proved kinder than she had expected, and piles of snowy blossoms had crushed one another on the coffin—presents from the numerous guests who had constantly been entertained at Mr. Newbolt's table—shewing wealth enough to have defrayed the expenses of a poorer man's funeral.

Zina was alone when she first recovered her consciousness. Her first impulse was to go to the window and put her head out in the fresh air, and her next to remember that she might be seen, and to retire from the light. Then she recalled everything—the wildly intoxicating visions of that night when she had thought that it might be possible for the spirits of the dead to appear to her, and the cruel and ignoble suspicions of the one man living whom she had trusted.

The cloud was lifted from her brain; she no longer reproached herself, but she could have laughed bitterly at herself for her misplaced faith, and for supposing that she could ever be the friend of one who could so mistrust her, as if the consciousness of a terrible crime—forsooth—had stepped between them. She shivered at the remembrance of her own insanity. It was all like a miserable nightmare, which made her still wish to hide herself, alike from the cruel sunshine which seemed to mock her, as from the stars with a million eyes which had likewise

seemed to stare at her burning shame during the intolerable agony of that ever to-be-remembered night.

But the delirium was over now—a thing of the past—and with its departure her strength of mind came back. She arose from her sick-bed an altered woman, more soured and suspicious, with her better nature crushed out of her by the conduct of one whom she had so devotedly loved; and whom she could not but believe to have been influenced by other motives than those which appeared on the surface.

She had received Stephen Dewe's letter, and never mentioned his name, but in her secret heart she said, "He left me because he found out that I was penniless; it was not possible that he could think what he pretended to think about me."

Neither did she trouble herself any more about Mary's creed, but felt thankful that she had been able to resist superstition, and that she had been

taught to repress the miserable egotism which might lead her to confide every puny trouble to a First Cause that possibly did not exist.

"As if my troubles would signify, even if It existed! I have to steel myself to bear, as other people have to bear things," she said with a sneer at her own expense, determining at the same time to cure herself of her susceptibility to the opinions of others.

There was a new hardness about her which Eva Capern recognised with astonishment when she offered her a home as her companion, and when Zina rejoined that she was "too proud to live on charity." From the sale of her father's furniture, books, and articles of *vertu*, she realised a little for her immediate needs; but much of this was required for the creditors.

To do Mrs. Capern justice she had never attached any importance to the self-accusations of an over-worked, highly-strung, conscientious girl, and she

really intended to be generous. Not the less was she evidently relieved when Zina declined her offer, telling her with an odd abrupt laugh that she had determined to try and forget herself and her own worries in Art. "If I can only lose my own identity in what I try to produce!" said the girl, a little surprised at herself for hating the proffered kindness of the woman, yet telling herself that Eva cared nothing about her, and only wished to make her an instrument for furthering her own ends; that her heart was in fact branded by fashion and worldliness as with the stamp of a hot iron.

That longing to be doing something more than could be found in the ordinary routine of an idle woman's life made her turn with greater pleasure to an invitation from Mary Carruthers. Mary's husband had been seriously ill, and for the benefit of his health she had given up her dismal lodgings in London and taken a cottage near Kingston-on-Thames.

"Come and be one of us and earn your own living," Mary wrote in a glow of enthusiasm. "We have found a house and garden to be let for almost nothing. The children are beside themselves with delight. We shall be better off than usual, as they have appointed me one of the editors of the Family Magazine, in which I have to act Mother Confessor to any number of young women of the shop-girl class, telling them about everything from Rowland's Macassar Oil to the choice of a suitable husband. James is already better, and we only need *you* to complete our family circle."

Zina was, as usual, rather angry with James, of whom Mary wrote with the tenderest pity. She had always felt certain that if James could be induced to be a little more active, his health would be improved. But her sympathy for Mary only made her the more willing to fall into her scheme of attempting to support herself by her painting. The time seemed to her very far off when she had pitied other

women for being forced to earn their bread; her opinion had changed since she had known greater hardships. People, on the whole, were very kind. The old Canadian had written that, though he had unfortunately failed in his project of giving the same visual prominence to a single photograph which had hitherto been confined to the stereoscope, he was not without hope for his scheme about balloons, and if Miss Newbolt would accept some employment from him, he was now busied with a new invention which would displace the telescope, and bring the far-away worlds so near to our eyes that a coming generation might be able to hold intercourse with the inhabitants of Mars.

Zina smiled as she re-read the letter on her short journey to the Carruthers. The flash and roar of the train, the wild flowers still blooming in the cuttings, the fresh green fields, the stately trees, and the coming in contact with ordinary people at the station were already giving a healthier tone to

her thoughts. The season of winter was comparatively near, for the trees were in their autumnal tints, but it was a blessing and delight to breathe the fresh air of heaven again. The scent of the earth sprinkled with falling rain was cheering as the sight of Mary's face, wholesome and encouraging, with no dismal talk about the past. Mary was accompanied by the children, and they all walked together from the station, picking their steps amid little pools of rain reflecting the grey of the clouds and the reds and russets of the decaying foliage, like tiny fluttering lakes in the road.

"It must be so stupid for you to walk," said Mary, as she tripped carefully over some of the poor little puddles, which were pretending that they too were of the sky, "so hard when you have always been accustomed to a carriage, and stupid for you to come at this dull season—no folk come to us at this time you know—and soon there will be a prevalence of snow and flood. In summer

there are water-parties, chance artists, and families from London; and in summer too the fields near us are rich with poppies, looking as if they were sprinkled with blood. We hope to have sparkles of gold from crocuses in the spring; we have laid in a good stock to plant, in our garden."

She was prattling to cheer her friend, as she would have prattled to a child, but Zina did not hear her. Her eyes were wandering away to the mould in the fields, on each side of the road, turned up for tillage, of a colour which was refreshing, and she was thinking that some such process of healthy "turning-up" was taking place in her own life.

No greater help could have come to her than Mary's unsuspiciousness, Mary's single-heartedness, and her matter-of-fact acceptance of the law of work for herself, and consequently for everyone else. Mary was too busy to think it odd for Zina to wish to be left alone to think. Without some such time for the healing processes of nature to go

on unhindered, as Zina told herself in after life, she might have gone mad, or worse still, she might have petrified into the mere semblance of a living woman. But everything seemed to help her in this calm retreat, everything at first seemed to be soothing to her nerves, from the tremor of air occasionally agitating the few dry leaves left on a poplar near her window to the stone-strewn rippling stream which purled on towards the river, and the beech twigs against the sky, and also beneath her window, of a delicate hazel colour, shading into a rich brown when the last leaves of all hanging by their feeble petioles fell off and rotted on the ground. Nothing was left then but the needles of the firs standing out against the wintry clouds.

"It was all the same to her," as she said sometimes to herself, "whether the sky were blue or whether it were grey," quoting in her despondency.

"The clouds that gather round the setting sun,
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality."

Yet the retirement of that winter did everything for Zina. She could perceive how it was owing to her own excitability, and the mismanagement of her own affairs that she had been nearly falling on the horns of such a dilemma.

She could remind herself not to cherish malice. To remember was not to forgive—she would try not to remember.

It was certainly amongst the middle-class good-wives, whose joyless hard-working faces she had at one time despised, that she was to learn common-sense. Mary prided herself on belonging to that class in society "who live in mean little plaster houses and have one flower-bed for a garden." The garden in which the crocuses were planted was certainly not much larger. But the little woman was healthy-minded, affectionate, and

energetic as ever. She knew well enough that till Zina came to this place of rest she could not think out the thoughts which tormented her. She was aware that her beautiful friend's mind was filled with odds and ends and tangled speculations, and that she suffered in trying to analyse her sufferings. Mary saw it, and did her best to aid her. As a psychologist, all these processes interested her; as a friend, they made her despair.

"I believe I might find an agent if you would take to decorative work—it is much the most lucrative," she said, managing to plan an artist's room for Zina, lighted by glasses so arranged as to cast a sufficient light during the darkest days of winter. "Your powers of brain and hand are a great deal better than mine. You are a real artist, who may expect to live by doing capital work; but I—my career is amusing. What do you think of my coming out as Lorna? That is my name in my correspondence for the 'Family Sympathiser,'" she continued,

chattering on in a somewhat long-winded fashion with the hope of turning Zina's thoughts. "Lorna is a wonderful creature, who sharpens her little arrows of speech for those who deserve them, but who is conscious of blundering when she means to help. I assure you there are some pitiful tales poured out to Lorna, and I had one girl the other day who said she would have committed suicide if Lorna had not helped her. Sometimes they write to me about such funny things. One girl wrote to ask whether I would recommend her to sit for two hours a day in a 'Nose Machine' as she had a dreadful 'turned-up' nose (she spelt it 'turnip'); and another woman wrote to consult me about a skin-stretcher, and some new little irons which had been invented to iron away the wrinkles. To the former I answered that 'tiptilted' noses had been glorified by one of our first poets, and that the best connoisseurs of female beauty would be horrified if 'nose machines' could do away with the *nez retroussé*; to the latter that

wrinkles were beautiful; that not only did the cleverest artists like them, but that as a matter of taste, I myself should like to look properly old when the time came. I said that there was something uncanny in always looking unwrinkled like the fruit, which remains green and hard, and never grows mellow.—That is all funny.—But sometimes," she added with a sort of shudder, "they write me private letters about terrible things—things which I could not tell you."

And Zina understood poor Mary's shudder; she sympathised with her distaste for any knowledge of corrupting things, any meddling with hectic complaints —a distaste which was characteristic of the woman.

"It is not my fault," added Mary quickly, "if I could choose for my own girls, I would bring them up in absolute innocence and ignorance. But some folks say that is not wise. Anyhow there are a good many people who grumble at poor Lorna, and she cannot please them all. One correspondent

writes to say that we ought to use better paper for our 'Sympathiser,' since it would come in so usefully for wrapping up parcels. Another scolds because I do not have the paper softer, as it would do for cleaning windows. One writes to beg me to have more politics, as it is selfish for women to keep to their own narrow interests; and then another says that politics are a mistake in the paper, and that I ought to have a column for society gossip. I always keep all this correspondence from worrying my husband. Don't you notice how James abhors the 'Family Sympathiser?'"

"Very ungrateful of James," thought Zina, who *had* noticed the look of slight annoyance on the ex-professors's face whenever that vulgar-looking journal was mentioned in his presence.

James had the air of a martyr who could not help feeling desolate in the circumscribed space in which he seemed to find it difficult to breathe, and amid the simple surroundings of the unpretending cottage,

with the dull britannia metal forks and spoons, unbreakable plates and tumblers, small allowance of candles, and the *pièce de résistance* in the way of a tough leg of mutton. The ivy-covered, plastered walls were unquestionably in want of ventilation, and the thatched roof was a mass of straw, in a more or less rotten condition. To hear James talk, you might have thought that the little dwelling to which his wife had brought him was a very Pandora's box of all the evils; and yet Mary had prepared a special sanctum for him, with embroidered hangings, in which he might take his siestas in peace, or pursue his scientific and literary studies. Cards were brought in for Mr. Carruthers' edification in the evenings, and his wife seemed never to weary of the eternal game of picquet, which she played to please her husband. And yet there were times when Mary had her depressed moods, though these never betrayed themselves in irritable speech.

"Pot-boiling is always pot-boiling," she would

say, with a little laugh at her own expense; "but what would you have? I have no literary connection, no big lions to call on me, and no fine house to receive them in.—Would you think I was the sort of person to produce 'shilling shockers' full of blood-curdling delight? And I mustn't introduce fact—people are scared at fact—you must dress it up and make it look pretty. The real is too tragic Why should I plod on with it, if there were not so many little mouths to feed? As it is, I go on producing, with confidence in my own mediocrity, knowing it to be just the mediocrity which pleases the people. My dear, I don't deceive myself—no mysterious ways are revealed to *me*, no new combinations. I trot on like a hack over the old beaten paths, worn with the patient footprints of other hacks before me, and such poor renown as I have won, such scraps of knowledge as I have picked up by the way—are worth nothing, nothing at all!"

"If everyone were as useful in the world as you

are!" cried Zina, who had already poured out her trouble to Mary, exaggerating the gravity of the case, and had received the best sort of sympathy, which was a dose of common-sense.

"I should not plod on," said Mrs. Carruthers, "if we were not straitened in circumstances, but I am not one of those who believe that the 'Lord will provide,' when ordinary human means have not been tried to avert a disaster. That is nonsense. We must do our best, and *then* we may ask for help. It would be hard to have to fight the world alone," she added, with the unwonted tears coming into her eyes, "even if I were supernaturally gifted; and you know that I never believe I am particularly clever. Sometimes I am sad, and then—

> 'My critic Jobson recommends more mirth,
> Because a cheerful genius suits the time.'

"They say they are going to form a society of critics —perhaps that will help us. Who knows? If we

could only look to someone whose criticism would be a real criterion—a brevet-mark of merit—but then you know with *me* that there must be the guinea stamp as well; and it *is* humiliating for me to have only to think of what will sell," she added with a very wry face. "But it is not worth being woe-begone about—it is my own fault—I have no pigments with which to paint, like your absolute reds, yellows, and blues, and I have no time to grind my colours—half the mischief is a want of time."

Zina too was somewhat unwillingly taking her part in all this pushing and struggling which was so new a thing to women—this beating of restless hands against a closed door—a door which now and then opened to some of the more importunate but could only admit a few. And every time it opened some of those who pressed most closely to it fell in the rush and scuffle beneath the feet of the more successful, and were trodden down till the life was crushed out of them; whilst newcomers, undeterred

by the misfortune which had happened to their neighbours, were continually swelling the crowd—the cruel crowd which, undismayed, trod corpses under foot, and pressed on—ever on—in the terrible warfare for fame and bread. And what was it, after all, even if fame did come to them, a year or two, and then the grave and the silence of oblivion. So thought Zina while still haunted by the morbid melancholy of past experiences. But day by day she was growing stronger, and looked at things with different eyes.

Her youth, and her good constitution had already conquered, bringing her calm and refreshing sleep, and it was now some time since she had lain sleepless through the hours of the nights in a wide-eyed fatigue which compelled her to read to stifle the thoughts chasing each other through her fevered brain. She prided herself on the philosophy taught by her father, and considered that it was *her* turn to speak cheerily to the over-worked high priestess whose

duty it was to minister to the *bourgeoisie* of virtue. For it was not often that the brave little woman allowed herself to wander into these helpless personal digressions. And Zina, who had been wonderfully successful with her own decorative work, looked at her for a minute without answering, the catch in her friend's voice making her own throat ache with sympathetic pain. Mary Carruthers sat watching the fire burn itself out, and thinking how often in her girlhood she had built fairy-tales as she looked into the dying embers, and dreamt of success. Life was not so much of a fairy-tale now, with her big baby downstairs needing his luxuries, the little ones upstairs clamouring for their numerous wants, and the middle-class public which she had undertaken to amuse, the biggest baby of all, and the most imperative, calling, "Dance for me, pipe for me, transport me into fairyland and make me forget my worries."

"Do you think," she said, with a half-hysterical

laugh, "that I like having to initiate people into the mysteries of bone-boiling and bill-reducing? Oh, how gladly would I be rich! It was not only for my husband's sake that I came here, but because I wanted to be revitalised in some fresher air, instead of being a mere cockney hack; but sometimes it seems to me as if my scribbling is still a paltry waste of time."

Zina tried in vain to remind her of her attempts to remedy crying abuses, and to aid the weak in their battle with the strong; and said it was a good thing to have had no part in the clever and corrupting books written by some of her sex. Mary only shook her head. There was something comical in the poor little woman trying to appraise her own value coolly and critically—her place in the 19th century compared to the ages which had preceded it, her relativity even to the future, in which the race and the appreciation of the true duties of womanhood would be more perfect—and saying, with a

determined shake of her head, "I am outside the ring of the people who are really worth anything, and it *is* more or less a ring now, both in literature and in art; I am bound to turn out trash to please my publishers; they say the public like it, and the people at the bookstalls like it; they must have that sort of stuff—if *I* did not provide it somebody else would."

Meanwhile, Zina herself was no longer sitting in listless indifference. Her want of will and want of nerve-power had disappeared. Not content with her decorative painting, she had taken again to the studies which she had pursued in Rome—the only difficulty being that Mary Carruthers had to furnish her model for a saint.

Now, though it would have been difficult to find a woman whose method of living was more conformable to the teaching of Christ, Mary Carruthers did not make a good saint. You could not fancy a saint who had once had piquant features and who was

now faded and pinched after a weary struggle for bread.

"Saints must always have long noses and look down on the ground; you couldn't fancy the beatings of their hearts quickened one bit; you are quite sure from the look of their faces that they have sluggish circulations" said Mary, dissatisfied when she caught a glimpse of her own face. "Yet you paint in the right way. The secret is to paint for the mere love of one's art; as one would paint if one were the only being in the world who had the gift of sight, and as if a trembling took possession of one till the thing which one saw was recorded on canvas. *You* will make your mark in the world."

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE COMMON ROUND."

So the two women mutually comforted and encouraged each other. It was a case, as Zina said, of "caw me and I'll caw thee," though never was there a truer illustration of George Eliot's words, that "opinion" is a "poor cement" between human souls.

Mary's exalted ideas had ceased to interest Zina, who only thought of them as human fictions, valid for mental states other than her own. And amongst the bitter recollections, which lowered her when she thought of them, was that of her hour of humiliation

when she had called on the dead to help her. No savage, as she told herself, could have debased himself more absurdly.

"Oh! my dear, my dear," Mary had said to her friend on her first arrival—"it is terrible to hear you talk so. Anything rather than to allow yourself to dwell on the mere material side of existence! I do not need anyone to prove a future life to me. I *know* it," she cried, looking up with her clear eyes, and a confident smile which from any other woman would have seemed to Zina in her present mood like irony.

But Mary dropped her voice, so fearful was she of hurting by word of hers that sensitive great-eyed creature of whom in her prosperous days, when she came to her with outstretched hands, smiling face, and beautifully dressed, she had conceived so great an admiration, and of whom even now she stood a little in awe.

"Dear Lord—help her in thine own good time—

for I can do nothing," prayed the elder woman. "Let not the hardness of Thy creatures turn her against Thee."

And when the blossoms re-appeared on the trees, and the voice of the cuckoo was heard again in the fields, a softening of the heart came to Zina. Mary's optimism did not seem so strange to her at that season of the year.

How could any painting, any music or any poetry render the effect of the sap of the spring, the sense of intoxicating life, the mystery of birth, the ravishment of existence? What art could interpret the tones of those exquisite greens, and those blossoms on the trees which stooped to meet the blossoms on the flowery meads?

The chestnut leaves were just unfolded from their sticky buds, fully out, but limp and hanging vertically as if wearied with the effort of birth; the foliage of the sycamore was emerging from dainty sheaths, the pear and cherry trees were in bridal white,

the apple-blossom beginning to flush rosy red, and the lilac deepening in colour before its clustered tassels were shaken out—clusters so difficult to paint when the beauty of a flower is made up of many sweet-scented units. And besides all this the flute-like notes of the blackbird and the merrier trill of the chaffinch were beginning to make fresh revelry round Mary's house. And Zina felt as if she might be happy if she could only forget the past, and be satisfied with the mediocrity of the family life around her. For, after all, Mary's home *was* a little unsatisfying for one who yearned after the ideal. The small troubles and worries of everyday life absorbed Mrs. Carruthers as they absorb the majority of wives, and there were days when Zina longed after something more cultured than even the Professor's society.

She was hardly able to keep her temper when she found that Mary's best seal-skin jacket had to be cut up to make a fur-lined coat for the Professor,

or that the old pedant was taking advantage of his too-confiding wife, and threatening her with giving up that effort of will which Schopenhauer had declared to be necessary to life.

"If he were to cease to will!" said Mary with tears, whilst Zina answered irritably,

"Don't let us talk nonsense, I should like to make a bonfire of the whole of that dismal philosophy! The gospel of despair, and propounded by a wretch who wore out the patience of his own mother, and kicked the only other woman who was good enough to tolerate him down the stairs. A gospel ever so watery would be better than that!"

She was determined to take no part in the attempt to make out that life is worse than it was supposed to be, and tried to shake herself out of a dull disgust for which she told herself she had no excuse, with the noisy and sometimes squabbling children (was it their fault—did not all children squabble?) and the selfish husband of whom Mary invariably

made the best. It was so good of her friend to continue to offer her any asylum—that she, being in the case of a beggar who had no right to be a chooser—did not like to acknowledge, even in her most depressed moods, the dulness, induced by the domestic interior, which occasionally came upon her.

She had seldom joined in the cry of emancipated women, but the Professor throned in state with his family worshipping him excited her irony as well as her laughter. Long afterwards she was vexed with herself for attaching so much importance to the small eccentricities caused by the weakness of his health. He coughed when he wanted anything; he made cabalistic signs pointing to the door or to the various articles of food, and it was understood that his children were to interpret these signs.

Zina had her own private opinion that the state of his health would have been better if the floors had not been covered with cocoa-nut-matting or the

doors supplied with india-rubber fastenings in deference to his acute nervous system.

Poor Mary was continually waging warfare with her neighbours because a dog barked or a cock crowed in a neighbouring garden. But when Mary's children were relieved from the presence of their father, they all talked together and clamoured for the same things.

To the wife and mother it always seemed as if her husband and children were perfect, but Zina could not be expected to see them through such rose-coloured glasses.

Why did James Carruthers always find such fault with small things? He looked picturesque enough-with his Aaron beard, and long melancholy face, but his constant complainings were like droppings calculated to wear out a stone? And why were the children, who had made such a picturesque group with their mother—when Zina had occasionally visited them—so difficult to live with? Why did they inter-

fere with one's palette and lose one's best brushes? Why had they such loud unmusical voices, why did the maid-of-all-work go about with a dirty face, and why did Mary herself have sometimes ink on her fingers?

Zina felt that Mrs. Carruthers was braver and stronger than herself, but for that very reason she could scarcely expect her friend to sympathise with her fastidious dislikes.

Mary's own troubles were rarely acknowledged, or found the ready relief of tears. The drops were easily brushed away, and she was brave again.

Thus it was that Zina could not help welcoming a letter, kinder in tone than usual, which came from Eva Capern, saying that she was suffering from a nerve-breakdown owing to the fatigue of too much dissipation, and that her London physician had ordered her to travel and to cheer herself up as well as she could with perpetual change of scene.

Her husband, who seemed to be always busied

about money matters, had gone off to America to see about some investment which caused him anxiety. Eva wrote that she did not expect him back till the autumn, and that perhaps it was all the better, as she was too knocked up to be a pleasant companion to anyone. Yet as Mr. Capern could not accompany her, she counted on Zina, and took it for granted that she would not be so unamiable as to desert her in the emergency.

"She used to be very difficult to deal with, but she can have nothing more to do with pride *now*, situated as she is," said Mrs. Capern to herself with unconscious vulgarity, as she wrote her note. "She is leading a make-shift sort of a life and must be glad of the chance of a change from it. It is really provoking to think how many good chances she threw on one side, and now people reflect on *me*, as if *I* had thrown her off."

James Carruthers was just then weaker than usual, and Zina, who had begun to fear that her

protracted stay might be a drag upon her friends, fell in with Eva's proposal, the more so that Mary urgently recommended it, declaring that a visit to the Riviera, Italy, and afterwards to Switzerland—for that was Mrs. Capern's programme—would be the very thing for Zina.

Eva received her somewhat coldly, though she had written gushingly, and Zina, who had intended to take up the acquaintance just as she had left it in her father's lifetime, suddenly "dried up," as Mary's boys would have said, at the reception which was unexpected, and evidently intended to put her in a new position.

"Your appearance is more presentable than could have been expected, considering how you have been hiding yourself," said Eva with a shrug; "but you must not refuse to let me give you some new dresses—and you really want a little feeding up; you'll soon be diaphanous at this rate; you look as if you could cast no shadow." Eva herself was by

no means diaphanous in spite of her "nerve-breakdown," and her hair seemed to have grown yellower, and her cheeks a little pinker.

Zina declined the offer of the dresses, wondering somewhat cynically what the hidden motive could be which made Eva long for her company. Possibly it was to provide herself with an effective foil in beauty of a darker and severer, as well as a thinner type, possibly to furnish her with an opportunity for patronising. It never occurred to Zina to reflect that, whatever her antecedents might be, her appearance was eminently respectable, and that she, at least, would not need rose-coloured blinds for the windows of her sitting-room, in the hotels in which Mrs. Capern would want her for a companion, whilst her respectability might give a touch of decorum to Eva's follies.

Mrs. Capern's laugh was strange and false, as she said, "You cannot possibly go on supporting yourself by this miserable painting. We must find you

a husband—an eligible parson, you know—to make the best of both worlds. Oh, I forgot, your father did not believe in that sort of thing, and neither did you; but of course you will keep that to yourself when we travel. It would not sound well, and I have always thought there must be a sense of security in having a clergyman-husband to get one out of any difficulties, and pave one's way to heaven."

Zina's eyes flashed, but she had learnt from Mary to be tolerant. Nor did she need to subject herself to much of this sort of talk. If she were to accept Eva's offer, and find her panacea in travelling—trying to patch up the strength which had certainly been impaired—she knew well enough that it would not do for her to be thin-skinned. But she was obstinately determined to accept no presents from Eva, and even insisted on taking her old valise with its ragged, worn-out leather, gaping at the sides, the only box she had left for herself after the sale of her father's furniture. She preferred to travel as

the poor dependant, if she were to travel at all.

Eva had to comfort herself with the fact that the hand baggage was more presentable—the cloaks and umbrellas being covered with a wrapper which Zina had embroidered herself. The latter had to cure herself of the habit of being easily jarred. And though there was that in Mrs. Capern's manner which reminded her of the fact that she was one of the disinherited, driven out as an exile from a luxurious home—a recollection which she had lost at the Carruthers' house, where there had been nothing to remind her of it—she was conscious of being glad to avail herself of the change. It gave her almost a feeling of ingratitude to Mary to acknowledge that she was glad, even when she had to wait upon the *soi-disant* invalid with her wraps and cushions on the Calais boat, where the sea—not monotonous in tint as some of our seascapes represent it, but changeful as the wind and flying cloud above it—brought light to her eye and colour

to her cheek. She began already to feel a different woman when, as Mrs. Capern's companion, she drove through the thronged Boulevards.

In the old days she had not been partial to Paris, which had seemed to her like the great bustling mart of the world, but now she saw it with different eyes. The crowd of well-dressed people was amusing, and even the shop fronts were exciting.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ANDREA DEL SARTO.

LONG years had passed since Zina had travelled, as quite a young girl, and had taken her lessons in painting at a studio in Rome, and she was astonished to find how little the years had changed her. There were the same quick pulsations of her heart, the same excitement of her lively brain, the same sense of exhilaration in the presence of something new, though she had told herself that she could never feel in the same way again. The thrill of wonder was still as great as when she had looked forward to her coming life. For she was still young

enough to be the victim of moods; too young to be world-weary; and too energetic to be tired of the life which she believed to be her only one, looking into the future with many a pang of doubt. There is nothing so mercurial as this sense of youth, which is not, after all, so much a matter of age as it is dependent on keeping the links between man and nature unsevered.

Zina was acutely alive to all those manifestations of nature which affect our senses and stir our blood. And as she passed with Mrs. Capern along that wonderful fringe of coast, which lies basking like a flower-bed between the mountains and the tideless sea, with the air clear, and the sun bright — the land of pine-forests, of aloes, and of palms, with the deciduous vegetation beginning to stir into green—she seemed to hear Goethe's words, "Children, turn back to Life; let the fresh air dry your tears!" She no longer looked back with morbid self-reproach upon the scenes connected with her father's death-

bed; her common-sense laughing to scorn the nervous fancies caused by over-fatigue and her conscience reminding her that her motives had been blameless. And she no longer allowed herself to regret the defection of Stephen Dewe; that he suspected her was proof enough that he had not been worthy of her.

She congratulated herself on the fact that Eva Capern's illness did not interfere with the rapidity of her travelling. Cannes, Nice, Mentone, Monte Carlo, San Remo—all were visited in turns; then Eva was still restless, hurrying on past the Maritime Alps to Florence and Venice. All was delightful to Zina; nothing came amiss, not even the less comfortable bedroom which sometimes fell to her share, after Mrs. Capern and her maid had been housed—with red-bricked floor, cold to the feet, and representations of pert little Cupids on the roughly-painted ceilings, or a brazier of coal for a fire. The wooded mountains, the tall campaniles, the olives with their silvery underleaves, the oleanders, the

orange-trees with their golden fruit, and even the melancholy cypresses, all sang the same song, "Children, turn back to Life!" The enthusiasm handed down since Sappho sang the divine wood-song that "Hesiod and Homer heard," seemed to inspire her heart and carry her back to the old simple times.

Everything was fresh and new; the little houses which looked like cardboard decorations, the oxen such as the ancients bred, the women with their distaffs—too utterly foolish and behind the times, but idyllic with rural life; the bees murmuring from the thymey hills; the boys and girls singing antiphonal songs, as they drove their mules into the vineyards, munching figs and bread; the old-fashioned agricultural instruments instead of modern steam improvements; the scythes, which needed sharpening and yet glittered like children's toys; and all these simple-hearted people, sleek and merry enough to upset the theories of modern political economists.

"The great thing is to be healthy both in mind and body," she wrote to Mary. "No doubt you will be vexed with me, but more than ever I am inclined to envy the ancient Greeks, whose very religion was a joyous one, and well free from the tormenting maladies of cynicism and disillusion."

Leaving the villages and reaching the cities seemed almost like returning to the evils of our more complicated civilisation; but here again were the old-world associations—the cathedrals with deep blood-stained glass, the sweet marble faces, spared by the iconoclasts, sleeping unmolested through the ages, with a wealth of gilding and fioritura even on the tombs. Zina had been familiar years before with the pictures and statuary of Florence, but whenever she could creep away from Mrs. Capern, who was somewhat *exigeante*, she would hug herself into delicious forgetfulness of all past vexations, feeling how small and how fanciful had been many of her morbid tremors, in the presence of the Raphaels

the Titians, the Murillos, the Botticellis, and the Ghirlandajos.

There are periods of spiritual convalescence after some of the fevers of life, which are as delicious in their way as physical convalescence. And Zina was recovering, slowly, tranquilly, dreamily, yet delightfully in these restful hours of liberty.

It was easy to gain time for such liberty before Eva had left her bedroom, for Eva's toilette mysteries were becoming more and more elaborate. Thus it happened one morning that, seated amongst the art treasures in the Tribune of the Uffizi, after satiating herself with beauty, she began to look round at her fellow-creatures. For if the infinite variety of nature had attracted her on her travels, the uncertainty and unconventionality of life had also attracted her—the people coming and going one knew not whence or whither and the *table-d'hôtes* frequented by types of every nation.

It was her habit to sit and watch the living pict-

ures as well as the painted ones for hours, paying them the subtle compliment of appreciative silence.

These shifting scenes impressed her imagination and amused her. Since she had lived with Mary Carruthers she had become interested in characterisation, that imaginative faculty in the observer which enables him to use the physical as the index of the spiritual. "The question is how a thing or a person strikes you," as she used to say to Mary when she tried to coax her out of her despondent moods. "You may not be able, like George Meredith, for instance, to crystallise the analysis in an image, but you can at least tell how it struck you, *you* individually; and first impressions are generally the truest ones."

Reading and painting after all were not like living human beings, and though her first thought in the mornings for some time past had been, "Oh, to be out and alone with power to draw fresh breaths and look at beautiful things for oneself," yet there were times

when she was conscious of a strange new longing for a warmth of contact with some real human soul.

It was not Eva's fault that she could not unbosom herself to *her*—Eva who chiefly lived to be the cynosure of all eyes, and who formed for herself an amusing sort of mental and unreal atmosphere like the heavy odour of patchouli which she always left behind her. She took Eva as she was and never thought of blaming her now.

The Tribune was very full just then. There was the usual gathering of British matrons with their comfortable husbands; of English girls and boys, most of them well-dressed, with good complexions and good teeth, and thinking quite as much about themselves as the pictures; of *piquantes* French-women, good-natured Dutch, stolid Germans, bright-eyed Italians, and there was a group of other men and women whom she found it difficult to label, as they dressed like the French, looked pleased like the Dutch, and had something of the self-sufficiency

of the English, while they talked each language equally well; probably they were Russians. But just as Zina was deciding this knotty point, and thinking how she, of all persons, should make friends with the Russians, whose acquaintance she had only made through Tolstoi's books, and wondering whether she should ever know whether her mother had been a Pole or a Russian, she was startled by finding a pair of dark scrutinising eyes fixed upon hers. The eyes, which belonged to a man of striking appearance, apparently about thirty-five years old, were very dark, corresponding with the hair, which was also dark, but already touched with grey. The figure was distinguished-looking, though it was only of middle height, its erect bearing, as well as the sunburnt complexion, conveying the idea of one who was a practised athlete, and had led an active life. But it was the expression of the penetrating eyes which made Zina feel uncomfortable. Something seemed to pass from them to

her, and she immediately changed her seat, saying to herself, nervously, "I wish people would not stare; it is one thing to make observations quietly as I do, and quite another to stare."

By the time she had changed her seat the stranger was no longer gazing at her. His eyes were fixed on the Andrea del Sarto, and then once more, as if unintentionally, he looked back at Zina.

This time she rose and went quickly out of the room, mentally accusing the man of rudeness. For there was no one to tell her that there was a wonderful resemblance between her own face and that of the Virgin in Andrea's celebrated group. In breadth of brow and the size and shape of the eyes, if the colouring was not exactly the same, and even in the very curves of the lips and set of the head, there was a likeness not to be mistaken. A likeness, and yet a difference, for instead of the peace in the countenance of the Virgin, there was a peculiar, undefinable expression in Zina's face

which seemed to separate her from other people as if she had suffered something which does not happen to ordinary women. There was a shade in the eyes, a droop of the lips, and a proud dignity of the whole bearing which gave her what her friends called her "Sphinx-like look." A man who saw her for the first time was likely to be startled by this unexpected expression. There was something about Zina which continually roused curiosity. But politeness generally kept curiosity within bounds, and Zina resented it angrily when she reached the door of the building, and found thatby the time she had been given her umbrella, and stood in the open air, she was face to face with this stranger. He lifted his hat as if in apology and walked in a contrary direction, but not before his eyes had again sought hers with the same intentness which startled her before, and she had time to notice that in the full light they were not only dark but of a deep blue which was unusual.

She was annoyed by the episode, but did not think of mentioning it to Eva, whose jokes on such subjects were amongst the drawbacks of her tour.

"He looked at me intently, I suppose, because he is an artist—artists and doctors have a way of looking at people as if they were lay-figures and one woman was as good as another—we are all possible models; *I* ought to know that," she said to herself as she made her way back to her hotel.

The affair would have been dismissed quietly from her memory, had she not encountered the same gaze a few days afterwards, when at Venice she was floating in a gondola down the Grand Canal past the Church of St. Maria della Salute, to the steps of St. Mark's. She was in the height of her enjoyment in fairy-like Venice, watching the silvery stars come out over the Moorish towers, when the opaline tints had faded and gleams from lighted windows streamed down on the rippling waves, when suddenly she became aware that another gondola

was slipping along ghost-like by the side of their own, and was startled from her dream on the bosom of the shadowy waters by recognising the same eyes once more as earnestly fixed on her own.

"Who is *that?* What a handsome man!" exclaimed Eva, who, in one of her prettiest toilettes, was reclining on the cushions in her wax-like beauty. She was in a position of perfect ease, silent and almost somnolent with the *dolce far niente* which suited her so well, listening to the music on the canal, where *contadini* were chanting their ditties in gondolas gaily lit with lamps; but she started up as she asked the question "Did you meet him in London?" with more interest than she had yet shewn in all the architectural glories of the old-world city.

Zina responded faintly, shaking her head and shrugging her shoulders. She had never any thought of making a confidante of her chaperon, but somehow she felt uncomfortable at the idea that the stranger might possibly be following them, unable

to resist the impression which impelled him onwards.

"I never heard his name, but I believe he was in Florence when we were there," she answered, telling all that she could tell. And even that little was drowned in the echo of a chorus, which floating past them with the gleam of coloured lamps from another gondola, jarred on Eva's nerves.

"They sing too loud, and they are awfully, horribly out of time," she cried putting her hands to her pretty ears, as the barcarole of another set of lazy rowers who were rowing away in the distance clashed with the chorus. Had it not been for her languor she would have preferred the Piazza of San Marco with its cafés and colonnades, its brilliant shop-fronts, its ices and its chocolates.

And she forgot to ply her companion with any more questions as they in their turn floated out on the liquid plain of water in the direction of the Lido, where the light was still clear enough for them to see the distant gray lagunes with trembling mysterious

shadows, the brilliancy of the stars, and the lanterns glittering in the gondolas.

"Perhaps he found out our names at Florence, and it would be very easy to track us to Venice," Zina could not help thinking, though she tried to dismiss the subject from her thoughts, and to take the same interest as before in the beautiful queen-like city which once had been mistress of the seas. "Perhaps, after all, he is *not* an artist, but some unhappy creature who has never yet seen his ideal, and is never likely to see it."

CHAPTER XVI.

A MEETING AT SAAS-FÉE.

It was a month afterwards. Eva Capern and Zina Newbolt had found their way to the Swiss mountains. There seemed to be no better place of refuge during the warm months, and though Mrs. Capern spoke scornfully of these days of "circular tickets" when one might have to sit next to vulgar nobodies at *table d'hôtes*, she made a virtue of necessity.

Zina had no possible objection. The past had now quite ceased to be a burden on her memory; she could look back upon it more than ever without

self-reproach, and could even laugh at herself for the morbid hours in her life when the veil had seemed to be lifted from the face of Destiny, revealing the stern spectre of Despair.

The life in her was so intense that it seemed almost ridiculous for her to recollect how she had once wished to end it all; the *Lebens-Glückseligkeit*, as the Germans call it, had returned to her in such full force. And she had become so accustomed to wandering that she could make herself at home in almost every hotel, adorning her own little box of a bedroom with her photographs in plush frames, her sketches of the scenery, her pieces of artistic needlework, and her dictionaries and books in different languages. Many of these things had been given to her by Eva, but it was characteristic of her altered mood that she no longer resented Eva's desire to patronise her, or to give her cheap presents.

For even Mrs. Capern and her ways had become more tolerable to her, as she learned by degrees

to forget her surroundings, and to adapt herself to the more ordinary phases of life.

And once more, at a *table-d'hôte* at Saas-Fée, when she was joining in the ordinary light chatter of the dinner-table, tackling in German a bearded individual who sat next to her, she became conscious that the same man whom she had met at Venice and Florence was sitting opposite to her and gazing admiringly at her beautifully cut features. The glance was respectful; there was nothing to resent in it; for he, too, was making feeble attempts at conversation with a German Marguerite with long straw-coloured tails of hair, who sat on his right hand—one of a row of schoolgirls who had come up for a few days from Lausanne, and whose mistress, in a stiff black dress. was seated at the end of the table.

She could sympathise with him in these efforts, for she always tried to make friends with the people of different nations, now that she no longer felt like an inhabitant of some distant planet come newly to

this Earth, whose time was short, and who was breathlessly studying everything.

There were some of the usual *habitués* of a Swiss Hotel, though the season was only beginning.

There were typical Englishmen of the climbing sort at the crowded dinner-table: young men who were clear-skinned, clean-limbed, and bright-eyed, with an air of independence which proclaimed them equally at home in all parts of the world. But the new comer was not a typical Englishman. He never relapsed into the cold and reserved islander, but addressed the people around him apparently with equal indifference, drawing one after another into conversation—Zina amongst the rest, leaving her no excuse for not answering him with that dignity and repose of manner and that perfect self-possession which had been characteristic of her in her best days.

She could not know that he was like a billiard-player, who by long practice and skilfulness of hand could

calculate the exact angle at which his ball would rebound, and that all the world was a sort of billiard-table on which he liked to play; nor that while it pleased him to pass for a man of culture, he was capricious, fanciful, and even a little disdainful, expecting women to like him the better for his cynicism.

"What a goose I was to imagine that Mr. Layton stared at *me* more than other people! Probably what happened at Florence was purely accidental," she said to herself after a day or two, during which time George Layton had managed to secure the seat which was next to her at the *table-d'hôte*, and she had taken him into confidence about a good many of their fellow creatures who afforded her amusement. Such, for instance, as the Dutchman who made his bow as if pulled by strings like the cardboard dolls they sell at fancy bazaars, or the dear good English matrons with stiff erections on their heads which they dignified by the name of caps, but which invariably made the foreign ladies shrug

their shoulders and whisper "*Voilà l'Anglaise,*" when one of them entered the room.

"There are various types amongst Englishwomen," he said sententiously, not thinking it necessary to explain that just now he was spending a good deal of his time in trying to analyse the harmonious impression which the mere appearance of this unconventional countrywoman of his had left on his imagination. Had he done so it is possible that she would have explained she was not entirely of English blood. For he understood the art of drawing people out, with a perception which was more lively, owing to the habits of travel, than it generally is under the murkiness of English skies, and he knew the stimulating influence of the friction of mind with mind. Thus it happened that in the course of a day or two—during which Eva had not been idle, but had found out that Mr. Layton was not only a large landed proprietor in England, but was connected "with some of the best people"—George Layton

had also made his inquiries. He had not only discovered that Miss Newbolt had suffered, and that there were times when her voice had a tremor of pain in it still, but that she stood so very much alone in the world, that the gay little woman who patronised her and gave herself airs about her, would be glad to see her happily married, if it were only to free her conscience from any feeling of responsibility.

The little chaperon, who was ready to flirt with anyone, was of a type as nauseous as it was familiar to George Layton. He hated her seductive smiles as he hated her style of dress, which was too showy for the mountains. He despised her artificiality as he despised her shallow pretensions to an intellect she did not possess. In the "set" in which he had mixed from early manhood, women more or less like Mrs. Capern were as common as blackberries in September. He invited them, he made much of them, and talked against them, behind their backs. But there was an absence of filigree about the other

woman, and she held him in conversation, unconsciously expectant of what she would say next. Her efforts to elude him piqued his vanity. For she still pursued her study of painting, escaping from other people whenever the *exigeante* Eva would allow her to do so, and making no secret of the fact that she would probably be dependent on this art for getting her bread.

Zina had been accustomed to climb the easier ascents, hampered a little by her palette and paint-box, in search of picturesque *châlets* and sunset effects. And it seemed to be one of the curiously fortuitous circumstances connected with her constant meetings with Mr. Layton, from the very time she had first come across him in Florence, that he too should be one day climbing up to these picturesque *châlets* just as she was putting the last touches to her work. She had long ceased to attribute these meetings to anything but the purest accident, and only laughed as she stretched out

her stiff fingers, cramped from the long use of the brush, to which she had been so little accustomed during the freedom of the last few months. It was a long, low laugh, very pleasant to his ears. For, as she told him, she liked painting in the open air. It was so different from the foggy days when her brain had often been weary, and when, in spite of Mary's encouraging criticisms, she had so often felt as if the realisation were sadly different from her first idea.

"I suppose it was hereditary laziness. I had been brought up to do nothing, but I used often to feel in England as if I could throw paints and brushes into the fire."

"Women are easily tempted to give up; owing no doubt to the want of education which for centuries retarded their evolution," he answered.

No one could have detected the slight inflection, almost amounting to irony, in the voice, or the sentiment, kept to himself, that women were *now* being

over-educated, but that the social vanity and the pettiness of the sex would make it impossible for them ever to do much. He smiled at Zina, as he gathered up her sketching materials and offered to carry them home for her, with a smile which, if it had been properly interpreted, would have said that if she expected to succeed she would be overrating herself very much, but that to discourage her would be analogous to crushing a butterfly. He need not have been afraid. She was weary of flattery, and rather liked the trenchant way in which he spoke.

"Hemmed in—circumscribed—with the forces of nature against us—what can most of us do?" he said, looking round at the mountains; "it is to the incapable that things seem easy. The incapable like the sham picturesque, the weakly and washily pretty, and hate the work which is not recognised, the labour which never shews."

After that they had a good deal of talk about Turner, Cox, Stanfield, and De Wint; the amateur

photographers who soiled their fingers with chemicals and so seldom produced anything like a landscape after all, because photography could not bring mind to bear upon nature, and the weak daubs which were so constantly exhibited in public picture-galleries. And though her new friend's passion for criticism seemed to Zina carried to an extreme, so that he was always able to narcotise himself with this criticism, she did not guess that in his secret heart he thought such talk more or less "drivel." It was not his way to be expansive with women; he preferred to play with them, and, if possible, to "take the lead" with them.

Yet Zina was a new experience to him. He scarcely knew whether to take her seriously or not, when she said, looking at him with the clear eyes which made many people lower their own,

"It is worth painting a little if only with the hope of learning to *see*; the majority lose so much. But the worst of it is I never can express the quarter

of what I see. And what is the use of seeing or hearing things unspeakable when you are dumb like the old Jewish priest, directly you want to share your visions with anyone else. My best efforts are always like stammering speech."

"It depends upon whether the emotion is genuine, as it seems to be with *you*—or whether one has to get the thing up. I am not an enthusiast," he answered somewhat lamely. He was puzzled and at the same time amused. There was an intellectual force about her which, though it might have repelled him under other circumstances, gave piquancy to his pursuit of her. It was real and unaffected. Her youth had been passed amid the "snows of science," she had seen a little of the world, and had been disenchanted like himself with its pettiness. She often despised what other women admired.

He was much inclined to laugh in his secret heart when she stood drawing deep breaths as she looked at the landscape, and when she confided to him

that it hurt her to hear the silly remarks made by the majority of people at the sight of beautiful scenery—and how the "*Wunderschön!*" so constantly repeated in varying keys by the Germans began to jar on her. It seemed to her only possible to enjoy in silence or in the presence of some sympathetic person, who could stand still and speechless like herself, thrilled by the same emotion. He took care to act the part of that sympathetic person, discussing with her the mystery of that great earth-movement which had called these mountains into existence, the dislocations, and the metamorphism of original structure. He tried to impress her by talking very learnedly about these geological mysteries, but he found that she knew more about the earth-crust than he did.

"She makes no pretensions, but, properly trained, she would be the Ninon of Intelligence," he said, a little satirically, quoting Balzac. And yet his intercourse with her had all the charm of a voyage

of discovery, for he was continually finding out new powers in her which others had not detected. Owing to her father's prejudices, she had never been taught to sing; and yet once, when he ventured out to meet her in the woods, he had been attracted by a song which seemed to him one of touching beauty. The singer was coming nearer to him, the trees still hid her; but her voice was growing louder, and, though it was untrained, it was true and sweet, soaring like a lark in the upper notes, with the possibility of a rich timbre in the lower ones.

"You did not tell me you were musical!" he said, feeling like another Columbus as he sauntered up to her, and relieved her of the sketching materials which he often carried home for her now.

And then he was a good deal surprised at the sudden cloud which came over her brow. "Do not accuse me of being musical," she answered. "I used to think of music as something that could awaken grand and generous impulses, and make one feel

nobler, stronger, better. But I was mistaken. Nero loved music. My father was right. He would never have me taught music; he distrusted musical people."

It was these sudden changes of manner, this sense of mystery about her, making him feel as if he were coming in contact with an unmapped country, which enhanced her fascination. Her very footfall was characteristic—firm as well as light—dignified and yet quick—with an unconscious grace of movement, unlike that of other women. And these changes in her expressive face, from the softness of Andrea del Sarto's Virgin to the grand and severe outlines which it could assume in repose—suggesting the transition period between the sculpture of Egypt and the more delicate outlines of Phidias—equally attracted him. He, who enjoyed his directing power as a man, wished to have the moulding of this enigmatical creature, whose simple dress was the expression of herself, varying from day to day, and whose features, when they suddenly softened with a glow

on her cheeks, had even a greater charm than when she stood, as she did now, with her head thrown a little back, and something powerful but almost cold in its outlines, as she cried, "I distrust musical people."

"Then thank Heaven I am not musical," he said in his secret heart. For the longing to win her had become wild and irresistible, and he was a man who had never been used to control his desires.

Her first intuition had been correct; he had tracked her from Florence to Venice, and from Venice, later on, to Saas-Fée, and—though he had not thought it wise to force his society on her at once, and had scarcely liked to acknowledge even to himself how he had run the woman to earth—he had managed to acquaint himself with all her movements, and had lived for no other purpose since the day he first saw her.

He had known so many women that his taste had become jaded; he had thought himself acquainted with every conceivable type; but now he had found

out for the first time that his ideal woman must be strong as well as agile and graceful; with her heart and intellect in unison; cheerful as well as melancholy, as the mood took her—one of Zina's greatest charms consisting in these varying moods.

Zina had suspected nothing of all this herself; but Mrs. Capern had divined it, and was ready enough to play into George Layton's hands.

It was too evident that she did not wish to be saddled with the care of Zina long, and her openly avowed desire to get her well married had at former times been far from flattering, yet on this occasion she managed her cards as skilfully as Mr. Layton.

"Nothing," as she sometimes said to her intimate friends, "can be so *gauche* as what your blunderers please to call straight-forward speech—as if language were not given us to conceal our thoughts." Eva's philosophy was not deep; it could be summed up in a few sentences.

"If you want to gain a favour never ask it directly; go round and round and you will gain your point. If people's talk shocks you, never let it be seen that you are offended by it. If you wish to be treated on an equality by millionaires take care never to let them guess that you are poorer than themselves. Drop your pretty speeches about like pearls from the lips of a poet, but never trouble your conscience about meaning them. And, above all, if you want to humour anyone who is stubborn or prejudiced, pretend to think as he or she does, and never contradict."

In accordance with these principles, Eva—assuming the airs of invalidism, and professing herself unable to walk any distance with Miss Newbolt—lent her ready assistance to plans for mountain expeditions in which she declared herself unable to take part.

It is true that she would not have been Eva, had she not compensated herself for her dulness by playing

out her own *rôle* to perfection in the *pension*—a *rôle* which was alternately languishing, sentimental, and sensational, and which enabled her to bring her eye-batteries to bear on the youngest as well as the oldest men in the hotel, reducing a few of them to a state of slavery.

To do her justice—when she took the trouble to exert herself—Mrs. Capern could be a pleasant talker. Since the day when she had known how to adapt herself to Stuart Newbolt's mental atmosphere by picking up scraps of information and bringing them in at the right moment, she had laid herself out for the art and could explain a few of its mysteries. One of her plans in drawing the younger men out was to get each of them to talk about himself, his own prospects in life, his special talents, and his disappointments. She knew how to sympathise at the right moment, and to prophesy in her softest tones a brilliant future for the disappointed hero. And as the pretty woman with her

languid ways roused herself to condole with him, to flatter, and to encourage, as if her interest were reserved specially for him, each lad in turn was wild with admiration.

END OF VOL. I.

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